



STUDY NOTES

EPISODE 16: LISTENING FOR NUMBERS

LISTENING FOR NUMBERS

Listening for or referring to size, height, weight, distance, area and temperature is another aspect of numbers which is important to practise for the IELTS test. These are units of measurement which are used to describe, for example, the dimensions of an object, the height and weight of a person or the distance to/from something.

There are two systems of measurement – the metric system and the imperial system. The latter is commonly used in the US, while the metric system is used in Australia, more widely now in the UK and in other English-speaking countries.

IELTS Tip

Practise listening for numbers. They can occur in any section of the listening test.

You may be required to listen out for a telephone number, someone's height or weight, the number of a bank account, a sports score, the cost of a gift, the dimensions of an object and others.

Each of the systems has its own measurement nouns for different measuring units.

Measurement nouns

Here is a list of those metric and imperial measurement nouns. Abbreviations are given in brackets. Note the spellings: litre, metre (British English), liter, meter (North America English) and others.

Measurement Units	Measurement nouns	
	Metric	Imperial
size, length, distance, height	millimetre/millimeter (ml), centimetre/centimeter (cm), metre/meter (m), kilometre/kilometer (km), hectare (ha)	inch (in), foot (ft), yard (yd), mile (m), acre
weight	milligram (mg), gram (g), kilogram (kg), tonne (t)	ounce (oz), pound (lb)*, ton (t) *compare £ = pounds (currency)
volume (liquid)	millilitre/milliliter (ml), centilitre/ centiliter (cl), litre/liter (l)	pint (pt), quart (qt), gallon (gal)
area	square centimetres (sq cm or cm ²) square metres (sq m or m ²)	square feet (sq ft, ft ²) square yards (sq yd, yd ²)
temperature	Celsius (°C), Centigrade	Fahrenheit (°F)

Describing size, length, distance, height or area

When describing size, length, distance, height, weight or area an adjective or prepositional phrase can often follow the measurement noun to indicate more precisely what the measurement is referring to. Examples are on the following page.



Examples	
Measurement unit	Adjective/Prepositional phrase
size	The front garden is 6 metres wide . The fabric is 2 feet in width .
height	Sally is now 4 feet tall* . The mountain is only 9000 metres high* . The flagpole is 12 metres in height . *tall vs. high – tall is used in reference to people, while high is used in measuring something from the bottom to the top.
length and distance	The country road is only 900 metres long . The service road was 200 yards in length . The electric lead is 25 metres long .
weight	The bag of wheat is 25 kilograms in weight . The average sedan is 1 tonne in weight . International air travellers' baggage is restricted to 23 kilograms in weight .
volume	The bucket carries 2 gallons in volume . The petrol tank of the Honda can take 60 litres in volume .
area	The garage is 90 square metres in area . The average residential block of land in Sydney is 7500 square feet in area .

Here is a list of the more common adjectives and prepositional phrases used in such measurements.

Adjectives	Prepositional phrases
high, tall, long, thick, wide, deep, distant	in size, in area, in distance, in height, in length, in width, in weight, in thickness, in diameter, in depth, in volume

Dimensions

The size of objects, areas and other things can also be described according to their dimensions, i.e. their length, width, height, depth or diameter. When giving the dimensions of something, the figures are separated using 'and', 'by' or the multiplication symbol 'x' (pronounced 'by').

Dimensions	Examples
length, width, height, depth, diameter	The chopping board is ten inches wide and two feet long.
	The vase is 12 centimetres in diameter and 25 centimetres deep.
	The sheet of plywood is 1.8 metres long by 12 millimetres thick.
	The dance hall measures 60 feet by 80 feet.
	The dining room measures 5 metres wide x 6 metres deep x 2.4 metres high.
	The cattle farm is 60 kilometres in width and 150 kilometres in length.
	The island to the north is 25 miles wide by 60 miles long.

Units of temperatures

Temperatures are commonly given in degrees Celsius (°C) or sometimes referred to as Centigrade. The US, however, uses degrees Fahrenheit (°F).

Temperature unit	Examples
°C or Centigrade	The maximum temperature recorded at Observatory Hill this year was 42 °C.
°F	Water boils at 100 °C or 212 °F. A comfortable room temperature is 23° Centigrade.



Written and spoken forms of measurement

Here are some examples of written and spoken forms of measurement.

Measurement units	Written	Spoken
length, height and distance	5' 7", 5ft 7in	five feet seven inches
	2.75 cm	two point seven five centimetres
	450 km	four hundred and fifty kilometres
	32 ha	thirty-two hectares
weight	250 g	two hundred and fifty grams
	4 oz	four ounces
	2.4 lb	two point four pounds
	17.15 kg	seventeen point one five kilograms
area	5.75 cm ²	five point seven five square centimetres
	2 sq m, 2m ²	two square metres
	34 sq ft	thirty-four square feet
volume	22 cl	twenty-two centilitres
	4 qt	four quarts
	6.5 gal	six point five gallons

Shapes

In addition to listening for and referring to size, area and volume of objects using measurement units, it is also important to be familiar with the shape of objects and things. Shapes can be either two- or three-dimensional.

Here is a list of two-dimensional shapes. These word forms are commonly used for descriptions.

Two-dimensional shapes		Description
Adjectives	Nouns	
triangular	triangle	three straight sides and three angles
circular	circle	completely round
semi-circular	semi-circle	one of two equal halves of a circle
rectangular	rectangle	four straight sides with opposites of equal length and four 90° angles
square	square	four straight equal sides and 90° angles
pentagonal	pentagon	five sides and five equal angles
octagonal	octagon	eight sides and eight equal angles
oval	oval	"squashed" circle
n/a	parallelogram	opposite sides are parallel

Here is a list of three-dimensional shapes. These word forms are also commonly used for descriptions.

Three-dimensional shapes		Description
Adjectives	Nouns	
spherical	sphere	shape of a basketball
conical	cone	shape of a pointed hollow ice cream cone
cylindrical	cylinder	shape of an oil tanker – long straight sides and circular ends
cubic, cubed	cube	shape of an ice cube – six equal square sides
pyramidal	pyramid	shape of a pyramid – commonly four triangular walls on a square base