

IELTS READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Having good reading comprehension skills is not only useful for the IELTS Reading test, but is also important for academic studies, work-related and general day-to-day tasks.

Previewing and **predicting** skills help process information in a reading passage more quickly, while **scanning** and **skimming** help locate specific information and focus on the most important parts of the passage.

These are the kind of skills needed to effectively and efficiently answer a variety of IELTS question types, including multiple-choice, sentence or summary completion, short-answer questions, completion of notes, matching headings, diagram or table completion and others.

When answering **True, False or Not Given** type questions, specific **strategies** need to be used which will help with **identifying information and understanding opinions** – the skills which are tested in this question type.

What is a 'True, False, Not Given' task type?

A *True, False or Not Given* question, which also includes the *Yes, No or Not Given* task type test how well you can identify information and how good your understanding of opinions is. The task requires you to determine: whether a statement is true or false according to the reading passage; whether a statement agrees with or contradicts the writer; whether the information is simply not given in the passage or it is impossible to say what the writer's views are.

These kinds of questions require you to find an equivalent statement in the reading passage in order to decide the answer. It is unlikely that the same words or phrases found in the question/statement would be used in the reading passage. Therefore, it is important to have an understanding of:

- **paraphrasing** – rewording of a phrase or sentence to mean the same in another context;
- the different ways words can be used – words which have the same or similar meaning (**synonyms**) or words with opposite meaning (**opposites**)

STUDY TIPS

It is important to develop not only your reading skills, such as scanning, skimming and identifying specific information, but also the strategies relating to each question type.

This will ensure you answer questions effectively and efficiently. It is also beneficial to practise your reading every day.

Build your vocabulary by learning new words and phrases, and finding words which are similar and opposite in meaning.

Consider the following three questions/statements and their corresponding equivalent statements from a reading passage. Focus on:

- paraphrased statements;
- synonyms, opposites and words which are not the same;
- why the answer is true, false or not given

Question 1	
Statement	Reading passage statement
The vocabulary range of the student is assessed in the IELTS Speaking test.	The lexical resource of the IELTS candidate is assessed in the Speaking test.
synonyms: vocabulary range – lexical resource; similar meaning: IELTS student – IELTS candidate	
answer: true – all information is the same/similar	
Question 2	
Statement	Reading passage statement
Many foreign students do the IELTS test in their home countries .	Most overseas students sit the IELTS test in their country of origin .
synonyms: foreign students – overseas students; do – sit; home countries – country of origin not the same but not an opposite: <i>many</i> versus <i>most</i>	
answer: false – the information is not the same	
Question 3	
Statement	Reading passage statement
Reading is very difficult for IELTS candidates.	Reading is the second most difficult module for IELTS students.
synonyms/similar meanings: reading – reading module; IELTS candidates – IELTS students; no match: <i>very difficult</i> and <i>second most difficult</i>	
answer: not given – <i>very difficult</i> has no match in the reading passage; <i>reading is very difficult</i> does not tell us if the <i>reading module</i> is the second most difficult ; the reading passage doesn't give enough information to tell us the question statement is true. Be careful, though, because there isn't enough relevant information does not necessarily mean the question/statement is false either.	

Key words

In the examples above key words in the question/statement were matched with key words in the reading passage statement. When matching key words look for words with similar meanings or synonyms and words with opposite meanings. Paraphrases may also be synonyms. It is important to look for words or phrases, which are not the same in meaning, but are not opposites either; however, they may be related.

Here is a list of the kind of words to look for.

synonyms/similar meanings	
adjectives	brave officer = courageous officer; beneficial effect = advantageous effect; different design = dissimilar design
nouns	area = district; antique = ancient; chance = likelihood; choice = decision; elegant = beautiful
phrases	energetic = having a lot of energy
modifiers/qualifiers	petite = really small; huge = rather big
verbs	switch off = turn off; should = ought to; delete = cancel; leave = depart; promise = commit oneself
not + opposite (less)	cloudless day = sunny day; not tall = short
opposites	
adjectives	deep – shallow; delicious – unpalatable; dark – light; happy – unhappy; efficient – inefficient
nouns	correct – incorrect; sunrise – sunset; liquid – solid; local – foreign; advantage – disadvantage
verbs	disappear – appear; agree – disagree; increase – decrease; look after – neglect; lose – win
not	guilty – not guilty; is the highest – isn't the highest
not the same (but not the opposite)	
modal verbs	should ≠ must; is ≠ may; ought to ≠ need to
modifiers/qualifiers	most ≠ some; many ≠ most; nearly all ≠ many
words in a scale	hot – warm – cool – cold; definitely – probably – possibly – maybe; little – less – least; much – more – most; well – better – best; badly – worse – worst; rather – somewhat – a little – a bit
other	impossible ≠ hard; unlikely ≠ doubtful

Answering 'True, False, Not Given' questions

If the question/statement and the reading passage statement contain all **synonyms**, then the answer is **true**.

If either the question/statement or reading passage statement contains one or more **opposites** or the information is **not the same**, then the answer is **false**.

If either the question/statement or reading passage statement contains **synonyms**, but also not enough relevant information or there is no match, then the answer is **not given**.

Strategies

When answering *true*, *false* or *not given* type questions, it is helpful to use the following strategies.

1. **identify key words** in the question/statement
2. **scan** the reading passage to find sentences which relate to the question/statement
3. **identify key words** in the reading passage sentence
4. **match the key words** in the question/statement with key words in the reading passage sentence
5. **determine** whether the key words are the same, synonyms, opposites or no match
6. **decide** whether the answer is True, False or Not Given

Be careful about how you spell **true**. Do not write ~~true~~.

Reading task Questions 1–4

Do the following statements agree with the information in the reading passage *Naturopathic Medicine*?

Write:

TRUE if the statement is true according to the passage
FALSE if the statement is false according to the passage
NOT GIVEN if the information is not given in the passage

1. Chinese, Indian and Greek healers laid a foundation for treating illness with herbs.
2. The Hippocratic school treated their patients using minerals, physiotherapy and massage.
3. Insect parts are used in Chinese herbal medicines because of their beneficial properties.
4. Naturopathy is widely practised by many cultures nowadays.

Reading Passage

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

A. Since the earliest beginnings, every known culture has been treating disease with natural therapies. Through centuries of trial and error, healers in these cultures laid a foundation for herbal medicine. The first known medical books of China, India and Greece all mention herbal formulas used for healing. The Chinese also espoused the benefits of using insects and animal parts in their formulas, while the Indians described the use of water in healing disease.

B. It is unclear when naturopathic medicine originated as a science, but historians agree that one of the first “healers” to make a link between food and health was the Greek philosopher, Hippocrates, who lived from about 460 to 400 BC. He is regarded as the father of naturopathic medicine, and also called the father of Western medicine. The Hippocratic school taught that the principles of good health and healing are found in diet and lifestyle. Patients were treated with herbs, fasting, diet, hydrotherapy* and exercise.

* a natural method of treating disease or injury using water

Steps in the strategy

1. identify key words in the question/statement

The key words in the following questions/statements are in bold.

- **Chinese, Indian and Greek healers laid a foundation for treating illness with herbs.**
- The **Hippocratic school treated** their **patients** using **minerals, physiotherapy** and **massage**.
- **Insect parts** are used in **Chinese herbal medicines** because of their **beneficial properties**.
- **Naturopathy** is **widely practised** by **many cultures nowadays**.

Further steps in the strategy

2. **scan** the reading passage to find sentences which relate to the question/statement
3. **identify key words** in the reading passage sentence
4. **match the key words** in the question/statement with key words in the reading passage sentence
5. **determine** whether the key words are the same (SA), synonyms (S), opposites (O), not the same (NS) or no match (NM)
6. **decide** whether the answer is true, false or not given

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	Question key words	Reading passage key words	Steps 5 & 6
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese, Indian & Greek healers laid a foundation treating illness with herbs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> healers in these cultures (every known culture) laid a foundation herbal medicine 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> NS SA S <p>∴ FALSE</p>
<p>Reading passage: Since the earliest beginnings, every known culture has been treating disease with natural therapies. Through centuries of trial and error, healers in these cultures laid a foundation for herbal medicine. The first known medical books of China, India and Greece all mention herbal formulas used for healing.</p>			
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hippocratic school treated minerals, physiotherapy and massage 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hippocratic school treated — 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> SA SA NM <p>∴ NOT GIVEN</p>
<p>Reading passage: The Hippocratic school taught that the principles of good health and healing are found in diet and lifestyle. Patients were treated with herbs, fasting, diet, hydrotherapy and exercise.</p>			
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> insect parts Chinese herbal medicines beneficial properties 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> insect parts Chinese herbal formulas benefits 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> SA S S <p>∴ TRUE</p>
<p>Reading passage: The first known medical books of China, India and Greece all mention herbal formulas used for healing. The Chinese also espoused the benefits of using insects and animal parts in their formulas, while the Indians described the use of water in healing disease.</p>			
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> naturopathy widely practised many cultures nowadays 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> — — — — 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> NM NM NM NM <p>∴ NOT GIVEN</p>
<p>Even though it may be true that naturopathy is widely practised now, there is no evidence of it in the reading passage. Personal opinions are irrelevant.</p>			



Summary

Question type: True, False or Not Given
Yes, No or Not Given

Skills: Identifying information
Understanding opinions
Scanning

Strategies: **Identify key words** in the question/statement
Scan the reading passage to find sentences, which relate to the question/statement
Identify key words in the reading passage sentence
Match the key words in the question/statement with key words in the reading passage sentence
Determine whether the key words are the same (SA), synonyms (S), opposites (O), not the same (NS) or no match (NM)
Decide whether the answer is true, false or not given