Frequently Asked Questions about the IELTS Speaking Test

What happens in the Speaking Test?

The Speaking Test lasts roughly 11 minutes, and has 3 parts. Strategies for each part are explained fully in this book. You (the candidate) will enter a room where an examiner is sitting at a table; the candidate and the examiner are the only people in the room. Your conversation with the examiner is recorded in order to verify the grade that the examiner gives you. The examiner will check your ID and provide you with paper and a pencil to make notes during Part 2 of the test.

What happens in Part 1?

The examiner will ask you a series of questions about some part of your life, for example your home country or your plans for study and work.

What happens in Part 2?

The examiner gives you a topic to talk about, related to something in your past or present life. You have 1 minute to prepare, and then you need to speak on the topic for between 1 and 2 minutes.

What happens in Part 3?

The examiner will discuss with you a general topic related to the personal topic in Part 2.

How does the examiner mark my speaking?

The examiner is looking for full answers to the questions asked,

using a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. The examiner will expect your answers to be relevant, well-structured and accurate. This is why you need to use the strategies we teach in this book. The examiner will make notes on a pad while you are speaking; don't try to see what the examiner is writing!

What are the examiners like?

IELTS examiners are trained to be friendly, professional and to make you feel comfortable. They are used to candidates being slightly nervous, and they will try to help you relax.

You should try to build a professional rapport with the examiner as soon as you meet him/her. You should smile, say *'Very nice to meet you'* and shake the examiner's hand. You should sit at the table in a professional way, as if you were at a seminar or a meeting, placing your hands in view and leaning slightly forward to maintain eye contact. This might be different from your national culture, but it will show the examiner that you are alert and interested in the test.

How fast should I speak?

Try to speak at a normal professional speed. 'Professional' in this context means the way you would speak in a seminar or business meeting in an English-speaking situation. Please note that this may be slower than the speed you naturally speak when talking in your mother tongue language. Don't get very excited or emotional, or make gestures which could be confusing, such as banging the table with your hand.

Should I speak in a very formal or academic way?

No! Candidates sometimes think that they need to speak in the same way as they would write in the IELTS academic writing test, for example by using words such as *'therefore'* and *'nevertheless.'* In the

speaking test, this is optional, but not necessary. It's more important to use the most advanced and natural English that you can, and organise your answers well.

I speak English with quite a strong accent. Is this a problem?
This is not normally a problem. Many people from English speaking countries have strong local accents. The only problem is if your pronunciation makes it difficult for the examiner to understand your speech.

I make some grammatical mistakes when I speak English? Is this a problem?
If you make a few mistakes and these errors don't stop the examiner understanding you, this is not a major problem. We have seen many cases of candidates who have a strong accent and who make some small grammatical mistakes, who still go on to achieve band 8 or 9 in IELTS Speaking. The problem arises if your errors stop the examiner from understanding what you mean.

Note: In this book, we use contractions (e.g. *don't* for *do not.*) It's absolutely ok to use contractions in the Speaking Test, because this is a normal part of speech in English. We also use exclamation marks (!) in this book. But remember that in the IELTS *Academic Writing Test* you should not use contractions or exclamation marks.