

True False Not given – reading tutorial and practice

Perhaps the question type that gives most pain to most IELTS candidates is the True/False/Not given question type. Here are some pointers to help you improve your IELTS band score with a link to some specific practice on this type of question.

The question types

In fact there are two question types here:

1. True/False/Not given: fact based
2. Yes/No/Not given: opinion based

In each case you need to decide if the information in the text agrees with the information in the question. You should note that in the “Yes/No/Not given” questions, you are normally asked to look for the writer’s opinions rather than facts.

Note the key skill

The key skill here is to understand that you are **interpreting the text and the question**. This means that you need to **read very closely** and pay attention to what the writer means. Don’t think of it just as a skimming question, rather a question where you need to read **parts of the text and the whole question** closely and decide what the writer means.

How to get the answers right

True/Yes

There is information in the text that agrees exactly with the statement in the question. Note that you will almost certainly need to look for synonyms here and match meaning and not words.

False/No

There is information in the text that is directly opposite to or contradicts the statement in the question. Again note that you will also need to think about meaning here. You should pay careful attention to “little” words that qualify or change meaning such as: *some* , *all*, *often*, *occasionally*

Not Given

This is the one that normally causes the most problems. Something is not given if there is no information about it in the text. Do not spend ages looking for Not Given answers because you will waste time.

Guessing intelligently

This is probably the hardest question type. Don't despair though you have a good chance of guessing correctly. In fact the questions are hard because you have a one in three chance of guessing! Here is my suggestion

1. if you find information in the text about the statement in the question: guess **True** or **False** but remember to **read the whole question** and not just match words in it
2. if you find no information in the text about the statement guess **Not Given** – don't waste time. Typically, answer are Not Given when they **match just one or two words** in the question
3. if you have no idea, then guess Not Given. You have a one in three chance of being right and you may have no idea because it isn't there!

Some examples of how the questions work

Macallan is one of the four top selling brands of malt whisky in the world. It is made in barrels made of Spanish oak that have previously been used for sherry because this adds sweetness to its flavour.

True

Macallan is globally successful.

This is true because *top selling brands of malt whisky in the world* matches *globally successful*.

False

Macallan is made in metal containers.

This is false because the text says it is made in *barrels of Spanish oak*. Because oak is a wood this contradicts the words in the question *metal containers*. Note that you need to think about meaning

Not Given

Macallan is made in Spain.

There is no information about **where** it is made. Be careful of the trap of seeing the words *Spanish* and *made* in the text. Usually with Not Given answers you will find some words in the text that match words in the question without matching the meaning of the **whole question**.

A difficulty – Not Given

The “Not Given” variation is probably what makes this type of question so difficult. How can you deal with this problem? You need to understand that:

- “Not given” does not mean no words in the question are used in the text. Typically, you will find some of words from the question in the text – they simply don't answer the whole question

- You cannot add information that is probably true: you can only use the information given in the text

Some practical tips

1. Read the whole question. Do NOT focus on key words. Think about the meaning of the question.
2. Be especially careful with words such as “often” and “some”. They can change the meaning of the question dramatically.
3. Be careful with questions beginning “The writer says”: here you need to think about the writer’s opinions and not about facts.
4. The questions will follow the order of the text: if you can’t find answer 12, you know it must be somewhere between 11 and 13.
5. Do not spend too long on any one question. If the answer is “Not Given”, there may be nothing for you to find.
6. One possibility is to mark all the “True” answers and all the “False” answers and then guess “Not Given” for the others.

A suggested procedure

Here is my suggested procedure:

1. Read the instructions carefully and note whether you are being asked to look for facts or opinions.
2. Look at all the questions and see what topics they ask about. You may note key words here, but only to identify the correct part of the text to read.
3. Skim the text to identify which paragraphs you need to read more closely. Note that the questions will follow the order of the text and so the answer to question 10 will follow the answer to question 11
4. Mark on the question paper which paragraphs relate to which question: eg, write 11 against paragraph E
5. Refocus on the question and read the whole question: be careful with tricky words like “usually”
6. Underline the words in the text that give you the answer. This helps you concentrate and also allows you to change your mind, if you find a better answer later.

A variation is to mark the “True” answers first as they tend to be the easiest and then go back to the “False” and “Not given” later.