

50 IELTS Listening Trap-Word Lists

Each row is one trap set: what to watch, and why candidates lose the mark.

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Tip: highlight 8-12 items this week, practise them in a timed mock, then unlock Pro for fuller banks and AI feedback.

Numbers, dates, times and money

Section 1 loves numbers. Speakers often float wrong figures before the real answer.

Trap type / theme	Words or patterns to watch	Why it traps you
Wrong number first	fifteen !' then fifty; thirty !' then thirteen	You write the first figure you hear and miss the correction.
Date order	the 3rd of May / May the 3rd; 03/05 vs 05/03	UK day-month order differs from US month-day habits.
Year vs age	born in 1998; she's eighteen; in her teens	You confuse a year with an age or a decade.
Time of day	half past / quarter to; a.m. / p.m.; 24-hour clock	You convert wrongly or drop morning/evening.
Money units	pounds / dollars / euros; pence / cents	You copy the number but write the wrong currency.
Phone and codes	double 6; oh / zero; area code; extension	You miss doubling or mix 0 with letter O.
Percent and fractions	fifty percent; half; one in four; a quarter	Question wants a different form of the same quantity.
Duration vs clock time	for two hours; until 2 o'clock; lasting 120 minutes	You write a clock time when duration is needed (or reverse).

Similar sounds and spelling

Minimal pairs and name spelling decisions decide many Section 1 marks.

Trap type / theme	Words or patterns to watch	Why it traps you
Teen vs ty	thirteen / thirty; fourteen / forty; fifteen / fifty	Stress and final -n are easy to miss under speed.
Ship / sheep style pairs	live / leave; fill / feel; ship / sheep	Vowel length changes the whole answer.
Confusable consonants	price / prize; advice / advise; close / clothes	You hear the near neighbour and spell the wrong word.
Silent letters	island; debt; receipt; Wednesday; February	You spell how it sounds and lose the mark.
Double letters in names	Allison / Alison; Bennett; double L, double N	Speaker spells it; you guess from sound alone.
Homophones	there / their / they're; to / too / two; night / knight	Same sound, wrong spelling for the blank.
British vs US spelling	centre / center; organise / organize; colour / color	Either may be accepted, but mixing forms in one answer risks error.
Letter confusion when spelled	B / P / D / T / V; M / N; A / 8; S / F	Radio alphabet or careful listening needed; you mishear one letter.

Distractors before the answer

Speakers often mention something that matches the question wording, then change it.

Trap type / theme	Words or patterns to watch	Why it traps you
First option rejected	I was going to... but; we planned... instead	You lock onto the first plan and ignore the change.
Menu of wrong choices	not the blue one; rather than Tuesday; instead of cash	Several nouns appear; only the last (or corrected) one fits.
Someone else's detail	my sister booked...; for my husband; the previous tenant	You write a related person's fact, not the candidate's.
Place mentioned then changed	meet at the library !' actually the cafe next door	Map/form blanks get the first place name.
Price then discount	normally £40, today £30; was 15, now 12	You write the old price or the full amount.
Example that is not the answer	for instance...; such as...; say, for example...	You treat an illustration as the required category or number.
Future plan vs current fact	we're hoping to; we might; at the moment we...	Question asks what is true now; you write the hope.
Partial match to stem	question stem words repeat early, answer comes late	You stop listening when you hear familiar wording.

Negatives, concessions and mid-sentence corrections

A single not, never, or actually can flip the whole blank.

Trap type / theme	Words or patterns to watch	Why it traps you
Clear negation	not available; no parking; never open on Sundays	You miss not/no/never and write the positive opposite.
Double message	isn't usually... except; rarely... but this week	You hear the rare case and treat it as the rule.
Self-correction	sorry, I mean...; no wait...; actually it's...	First version is wrong; final correction is the answer.
Speaker A vs speaker B	one speaker suggests, the other decides	You write the suggestion, not the agreed decision.
Unless / without / apart from	closed unless booked; free apart from weekends	Exception language reverses what you expected.
Too / enough / only	too late; not enough seats; only members	Limiters change eligibility; you ignore the restriction.
Question with negative stem	which is NOT mentioned; except; which is false	You pick a true detail instead of the odd one out.
Emphasis then retract	definitely the 10th... oh, hang on, the 11th	Confident first claim feels more answer-like than the fix.

Names, places, British/US variants and form rules

Spelling, word limits and variety differences quietly steal marks.

Trap type / theme	Words or patterns to watch	Why it traps you
Name spelling aloud	That's M-A-C...; with a double T; hyphenated	You invent spelling from pronunciation.
Surname vs first name	Mr Patel; call me Sam; family name / given name	Form asks for surname; you write the first name.
Street types	Road / Street / Avenue / Lane / Close / Crescent	You get the name right but the wrong road type.
British vs US vocabulary	lift / elevator; flat / apartment; queue / line; holiday / vacation	Audio uses one variety; you answer with the other form the key rejects.
Word limit breach	NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER	Correct idea, too many words, zero marks.
Article and plural errors	a / the; library vs libraries	Meaning is right but grammar form fails the key.
Abbreviation vs full form	Lab / laboratory; Uni / university; info / information	You write short form when the key expects full (or reverse).

Postcode and reference codes	letters and numbers mixed; spoken as groups	You reorder characters or miss a letter in the middle.
Title and honorific	Dr / Mrs / Ms / Prof; miss vs mrs	Title is part of the answer or distracts from the name field.
Same place, different label	main hall / auditorium / lecture theatre	You write a synonym that is not on the map key.

Section 3-4 academic and discussion traps

Seminars and lectures pack paraphrase, opinion shifts and research jargon.

Trap type / theme	Words or patterns to watch	Why it traps you
Opinion vs fact	I reckon; in my view; the data show	You treat a personal view as the study finding.
Hypothesis then result	we expected...; surprisingly...; in fact...	You write the expectation instead of the outcome.
Cause and effect swap	leads to; results from; due to; consequently	You reverse which thing caused which.
Old theory discarded	used to believe; outdated view; no longer accepted	You note the classic theory the speaker rejects.
Scope limiters	only in coastal areas; mainly among adults; in this study	You generalise beyond the speaker's limit.
Comparative extremes	higher than; the highest; less than before	You pick the wrong end of a comparison.
List where only one fits	methods: survey, interview, experiment - question asks one	You write two methods or the wrong method from the list.
Paraphrase of technical term	precipitation !' rainfall; offspring !' young; urban !	You wait for the exact word and miss the synonym blank.

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