

Most common mistakes in the exam and how to avoid them

Most common mistakes in the exam

Reading and Listening:

The candidate's answer exceeds the set number of words acceptable for a correct answer.

#1


There are 2 tasks where the maximum number of words acceptable for a correct answer is set. The limit is 3 words at B1 level, and 5 words at B2 and C1 levels. If your answer exceeds the limit, you will not get a score for that specific question even if the answer is right.

Example (B2 level, Reading Part 4):


Reading Part 4

Read the text and answer the questions. **Write a maximum of five words** for each answer. An example is done for you.

1. What unofficial 'title' does Michael Johnson hold?

fastest man in the world (5 words) 

1. What unofficial 'title' does Michael Johnson hold?

he is the fastest man in the world (8 words) 

Most common mistakes in the exam

Listening, Reading and Writing parts:

Candidates don't use the monolingual dictionary effectively.

#2

During the exam, don't forget to use your **monolingual dictionary**. When you feel you have finished the piece, go through the text checking it for **spelling, grammar and prepositional errors**.

Example:

*"Hi Eve, I **spoked (1)** with John and he told me about our holiday. I am really **looking forward to spend (2)** time with you..."*

The above candidate could have easily scored higher marks if he had used his dictionary effectively. Let's have a look at the two highlighted examples and their entry in the dictionary.

1. Speak (**spoke**, spoken)
2. Look forward to something: to be thinking with pleasure about something that is going to happen... example: *I'm looking forward to the weekend. We're really **looking forward to seeing** you again.*

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Listening Part 4:

Candidates tend to forget that they have a second chance to listen to the recordings in the Listening part of the exam.

#3

Listening Part 4

*Listen to the conversation and answer the questions. Put a circle round the letter of the correct answer. Look at the questions. An example is done for you. **You will hear the conversation twice.***

This part is the longest recording you hear. Remember that you need to keep listening with attention right up to the end of the conversation and that you **have a second chance** to confirm your answer.

For example, you can hear words for the first time that could lead you to choose the wrong answer. However if you wait and **listen carefully in the second round**, you can **put the clues together** to help you find the correct option.

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Reading parts:

Candidates spend too much time on this part and then do not have enough time for the Writing section.

#4

There are lots of course books and practice test booklets which have good texts to read, and questions to answer afterwards. Practise as much as possible under time pressure; give yourself 30 minutes the first time and then try to get it down to 15 with practice. This will mean you should not take too long on the reading tasks.

Read a lot in English and practise using a dictionary. Practise this a lot before the test so you are an expert by the time the test comes.

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Reading Part 3:

Candidates think they need to understand every word in the text in order to complete the task.

#5

This part of the exam tests how well you can understand texts for **general purpose, meaning and for specific details**. You will be given 4 texts all about the same topic.

You **don't need to understand every word** in the texts to answer the questions but you need **to read the texts carefully** because the information you need will only be in one text, but words from the question may appear in several of the texts.

The questions you answer are not connected so if you can't find one of the answers it won't affect your answers to the other questions.

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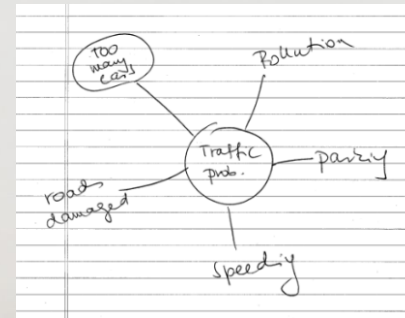
Writing parts:

Candidates run out of time so they don't finish the writing task.

#6

We recommend that you **plan your time** before you start the Reading and Writing tasks. Do all of the Reading that you can do easily and leave anything difficult. Make sure you move on to the Writing when you still have plenty of time left. You can go back to finish the Reading later, if you need to.

- **Writing:** plan your work! Use **mind maps** instead of starting to write straight away! A **mind map** helps you plan and organise the structure of your writing task:



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Writing parts:

Candidates don't use vivid words or more complex structures.

#7

When you are preparing for the exam, remember that you have to show the examiner that your language skills are at the level being tested and therefore it is vital that you **show them what you know**. Replace simple general words such as **nice, good, big** etc. with more specific synonyms - e.g. **'perfect', 'horrible', 'pleasant'**.

Use your monolingual dictionary to look for more descriptive and specific vocabulary.

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Writing parts, B2 Communicator level:

Candidates don't think enough about what they want to say and who they are writing to.

#8

- **Writing Part 1** tests how well you can produce a **formal response** to a short text (letter, report, graph, etc.) You are expected to show that you are aware of the **differences between formal and informal writing**. You should use forms such as *'I would like to'* instead of *'I want to'*. Choose appropriate words e.g. *'I have received'*, not *'I've got'*.
- **Writing Part 2** tests how well you can produce a piece of **informal writing**. Your writing should be in a style which is **appropriate to your target reader**. In a letter to a friend, for example, it is natural to use contractions like *I'm* or *it's*. You can write creatively, but make sure that what you write fits with the topic and the question.

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Speaking Part 1:

Candidates do not know how to answer the simplest questions.

#9

This part always starts in the same way. The interlocutor will ask you to **spell your family name**. Make sure you know how to pronounce the letters of the alphabet accurately in English.

The interlocutor has a **list of questions** to ask you. All you have to do is **answer**. All the **topics will be familiar**: your daily life, the people and places you know, your likes, dislikes, etc.

Do not simply answer 'Yes' or 'No'; give **full answers** to demonstrate your range of language. Practise giving an answer and adding more information; words like 'because' and 'but' make it natural to say more. The interlocutor may ask 'Why?' or 'Why not?' to give you the **chance to say more**.

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Speaking Part 2:

Candidates misunderstand which role they have to play in the situations.

#10

In this part of the Spoken exam the interlocutor will read **two situations**. You won't see the situations written down. If you miss something the interlocutor says, **ask to hear the situation again**.

1. In the first situation the interlocutor will speak first and you will respond.
2. In the second situation the interlocutor will ask you to start.

There may be a third situation – it depends on the time.

Remember, **you are always yourself** in a social situation - the interlocutor will tell you the role she/he is playing.

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Speaking Part 2:

Candidates misunderstand which role they have to play in the situations.

#11

In this part of the Spoken exam you will have a task sheet. At some levels you will have different information to the interlocutor – at some levels you will both have the same information. You and the interlocutor will exchange information and ideas and try to make a decision together.

Remember:

- You have 20 seconds to think about what you are going to say.
- **Don't be afraid to disagree** – it's all part of the test.
- You and the interlocutor don't have to talk about everything on your task sheet. **The important thing is to keep talking.**

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Speaking Part 4:

Candidates think that they are being tested on their knowledge of the topic.

#12

In this part of the spoken exam you are going to talk on your own. You have 30 seconds to make notes.

Remember:

- You are **not being tested on your knowledge of any topic!**
- You have 30 seconds to make notes. **Don't try to write full sentences** to read out, just **make notes of the most important things** you want to say. (The notes you make are not assessed.)
- Speak for as long as you can. When you finish, the interlocutor will ask you some follow-up questions.

Thank you!

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