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IELTS Speaking Exam Part 2 – The topic

In this section of the speaking exam the examiner will hand you a card with a topic. Here is an example of what your card will look like:

Describe a celebration you remember. Explain why it was memorable.

You can include:

- What event was being celebrated
- Where the celebration took place
- Who was there
- Why it was enjoyable

You will notice the topic is given in the first sentences. Then there are bullet points with suggested things to talk about.

You have 1 minute to make any notes you wish before you speak about this topic for 2 minutes.

My advice – Don't just sit there, make some notes!

I've watched too many students do nothing for 1 minute.

Then after 1 minute (or even 30 seconds) they start speaking.

They stop speaking after about another minute and look embarrassed.

You are on your way to losing so many points if you do this. You are expected to speak for 2 minutes, without any questions from the examiner, so make sure you plan.



OK so what should I do first?

Look carefully at the topic and suggested bullet points and think about your personal experience.

You should be able to think of something within 5 seconds. Make sure it's something you can easily talk about – so you need to know details. If you practice lots of different topics before the exam then this process should become easier for you.

[Click here to download some Part 2 topic cards.](#)

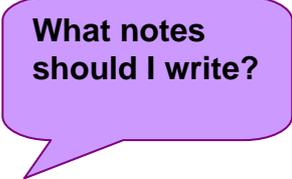


What if I don't have any ideas?

Then be creative! Some students are great at making up stories and excuses about missing class and not doing homework! If this is you, apply the same technique to this part of the exam!

If you have to do this, make sure you tell the examiner at the beginning of your 2 minutes that you haven't done the topic yourself, but your mother/ brother/ best friend has. So you are telling their story.

Why? This tells the examiner that you may not have all the details of the topic. It also means that if you hesitate over some parts, or get a little confused and have to change your information, the examiner won't mistake this for problems with English. Of course if you do this too much then they will think you have problems with English!

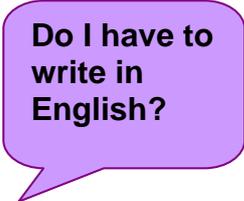


**What notes
should I write?**

Don't write sentences. This takes too long so you have less planning time.
Write words – these should act as prompts reminding you what you want to say.

Follow the bullet points – they normally include a number of WH style questions (What, Where, Why, When, Who...with etc.) These types of questions mean you need to give details.

Also try to write your notes in some kind of order – this will help you to present your talk in a logical way.



**Do I have to
write in
English?**

No, you don't.

If you find it easier to use your own language then do that. Nobody will check your notes. However, some people find it hard to read notes in one language and speak in another. You could also find you use the wrong language when speaking, or you forget the English word under pressure – so be careful. Practice both ways before the IELTS exam and see which feels most comfortable.

Let's take a look at an example.

These are the notes I made when preparing for the celebration topic on the first page. When I made these notes I wrote very quickly and used abbreviations. In order that you can read and understand my notes I have written them again clearly. So my notes did not look this beautiful when I wrote them in 1 minute!



Notice that I've written the notes in some kind of logical order.

For example, at the top is the name of the celebration, what it is and when it is. On the left I've written where it was and who was there. In the middle there is a list of details which basically explain what happened. On the right there is a separate list that relates to the questions why it was enjoyable and why it was memorable.

These are fairly comprehensive notes!!!! When I did my talk I certainly didn't have enough time to talk about everything. However, this is a far more relaxing position to be in than finishing your talk in less than 2 minutes and having nothing else to say.

To listen to my 2 minute talk on this topic, [visit my web page](#).

Clearly this talk answers the task set and fulfils the 2 minute requirement.

What other things did I do in my talk?

I organised and linked my ideas throughout the talk.

Listen again and notice how I use these phrases:

<u>Introduction:</u>	...Right...I'm going to talk about...(celebration name, date, what it is) ...I can remember as a child...
<u>Ordering ideas:</u>	...and after (church)... ...and eventually... ...After that ...
<u>Linking ideas:</u>	...Anyway... ...But I also remember... ...Also (the food)... ...Because of that (food)...
<u>Giving opinions:</u>	I think this is a very strong childhood memory for me...

Of course there are other useful phrases you could use for linking ideas and giving opinions. Here are few more possibilities:

One thing I remember is...
What I particularly remember is...
Another good / bad thing about...is / was...
The reason I don't / didn't enjoy...is / was...
As I see it...
I reckon...
Personally...
For example / For instance...

I use a variety of vocabulary.

In the IELTS exam Speaking Part 2 you are normally asked to describe something – an object, a place, a person, an activity or event etc. So it's important that you can use a variety of interesting adjectives to do this.

So many of my students panic under pressure and repeat words such as 'good' and 'bad', even though they are Upper Intermediate level or above. So try to develop your vocabulary so that you can describe things in an interesting way.

Listen again and notice how I use these words:

Adverbs used to develop adjectives	Adjectives	Topic-related / interesting vocabulary
really	terrible	memory
very	amazing	remember
extremely	fantastic	remind
almost (the best..)	delicious	sounds and smells
	comfortable	childhood
	exciting	atmosphere
	pleasant	insist on
	happy	associate with
		take place
		go off

I also use a variety of grammar structures.

Under pressure you may feel like using structures you are most comfortable with. That's why it's very important that you practice using a variety of simple and complex grammar structures when speaking, so that in the IELTS speaking exam you can comfortably use them.

Listen again and notice when I use these structures:

Be going to for future plans	I'm going to talk about...
Past habits	My father would wake us up... ...that happy time we used to spend together.

Past simple	After that we generally fell asleep
Past obligation	...we had to stand up for the national anthem.
Present simple	I remember my grandfather insisting on... This is a very strong childhood memory...
Zero conditional (using when instead of if)	When I smell them or hear them today, it really reminds me of that happy time...

There are, of course, many other structures you could include, depending on the topic you have. For example, after listening to my students do the test, I often encourage them to think about using relative clauses, passive sentences and conditionals. Because we focus on using these in the IELTS writing exam, (and hopefully they become more proficient at using them), then it is easier to use them in the IELTS speaking exam as well.

What should I do next?

First choose an IELTS exam Speaking Part 2 topic to practice with.

[You can download some topic cards here.](#)

Record yourself speaking for 2 minutes. Listen to the recording a few times, and try to answer these questions:

- Did I write useful notes? Can I improve this?
- Do I answer the topic appropriately?
- Do I talk about the topic in a logical order?
- Did I link my ideas clearly?
- Did I use interesting vocabulary?
- Did I use a variety of grammar structures?
- Did I make any vocabulary or grammar mistakes?

You should practice with as many topics as you can. This is the only way you can improve your performance. Also, this means you will have covered a lot of topics, and therefore you might be lucky and get something similar in the exam.

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