In 2009, IELTS celebrated its twentieth anniversary. The test is now taken by well over a million candidates per year worldwide and is recognized in 120 countries. It is not only used as an entry requirement to demonstrate English language proficiency for universities in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States but also as a requirement for immigration to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

IELTS has two versions, Academic and General Training (GT). All candidates take the same Speaking and Listening tests, while those intending to follow an academic course of study in an English-speaking country take the Academic Reading and Writing modules, and those taking the test for other purposes such as for immigration or to attend vocational training courses take the GT Reading and Writing modules. At present, the majority of candidates take the Academic version, although the proportion of GT candidates is growing.

IELTS is available on 48 fixed dates per year and candidates can resit at any time. Candidates do not pass or fail the test. Instead, IELTS uses a nine-band scoring system to measure and report test scores. Candidates are given individual band scores for Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, together with an overall band score based on the results of the four modules. Educational institutions and other organizations specify the band they require.

While there is no requirement for candidates to follow a course before taking the examination, in practice the majority do so. This has led to a huge increase in demand for schools all over the world to provide preparatory courses. In turn, teachers who may previously have little experience of teaching academic English may find themselves preparing students for IELTS.

The ways in which an IELTS course may be delivered vary. Candidates may follow a full-time IELTS course lasting several weeks, for example a ten-week course providing 200 hours of IELTS tuition plus self-study. Alternatively, many take an IELTS course as an ‘add-on’ to a full-time general English course, for example a ten-week general English course including 60 hours of IELTS tuition. Candidates may also take shorter full-time courses, for example a two-week course providing 40 hours of IELTS tuition plus self-study, or part-time/evening courses, for example...
a ten-week course providing 20 hours of IELTS tuition together with self-study. Finally, a candidate may follow a self-study course, which may or may not be monitored by a teacher.

**What do candidates need to do to prepare for IELTS?**

In general, candidates may need to
- improve their language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—so that they can perform at the required level in the test and demonstrate that their English is at an appropriate level to enable them to live, study, and work in an English-speaking environment;
- improve their command of language systems—grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse—in order to support communication;
- gain familiarity with exam tasks and techniques themselves so that they can perform to the best of their ability in the test;
- study the language and style of Academic English (if they are taking the Academic modules).

**Common needs and problems for IELTS training**

The Listening module tests the ability to process spoken language at near-normal speed, heard once only. While this reflects the situation most candidates will find themselves in when they work or study in an English-speaking country, it is a challenge for those used to tests in which texts are repeated. Candidates also need to be able to understand the accents of different English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, reflecting the international nature of IELTS.

For the Academic Reading module, candidates need the ability to read extended texts (three texts of around 900 words each) within the time allowed. To achieve this they require a degree of automaticity in terms of common vocabulary and structures, the ability to cope with or ignore unknown vocabulary, and an awareness of the types of discourse structure typical of academic text.

Candidates also need to be able to give and support ideas and opinions in both the Speaking and Writing modules. These may be related to their own lives and experiences, but candidates also need to have some awareness of more general issues in order to cope well with Writing Task 2 and Speaking Part 3.

For some candidates, the need to process graphs, charts, and other visual material in Academic Writing Task 1 is a new challenge for which they need specific training.

Since IELTS has no separate Use of English test, candidates’ knowledge and control of language systems such as grammar and vocabulary are tested through receptive and productive communicative tasks in all parts of the exam. But a candidate at, say CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), level B2 who needs a Band 7.5 at IELTS will probably need to focus on the systems of the language as well as on skills development and exam technique.
The nature of an IELTS course will be different from other exam courses in several ways:

- IELTS is a high-stakes test, which is often associated with a major life change, either temporary (for a student doing an overseas course) or permanent (for those taking the exam for immigration purposes).
- The topics and texts in Academic Reading, and in parts of the Listening, are academic and, while aimed at non-specialists, may cover a wide range of disciplines, for example in science, business, or the humanities.
- Because students are working towards particular bands, classes may include a wider range of abilities than those preparing for exams that have a pass or fail structure. A teacher may have, for example, some students at Band 5 aiming at Band 6.5, together with a student who already has Band 7 but needs 7.5 to do a particular university course.
- Since candidates may, and often do, take the test more than once, a class may include some students who are already familiar with the test and the techniques required, while others are new to the test and need considerable input in this area.

This Survey Review covers IELTS materials published since 2006.

At present, the majority of preparation materials are for Academic candidates, with most books focusing solely or mainly on this version.

A clear overview of the exam providing information about the testing focus of each module and section.
- Relevant topics reflecting the academic nature of the exam where appropriate.
- Skills support: to analyse and improve performance in each of the skills.
- Language support: to allow progress in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- Accurate coverage of all exam tasks including rubrics, tasks, and texts. While not all activities in the book need to be exact replications of exam tasks, it should be clear which are and which are not. Information about exam tasks, and the tasks themselves, should be an accurate reflection of the IELTS test.
- Study skills development appropriate for those about to go to university, including self-assessment.
- Clear accessible layout.
- Up-to-date information about marking criteria.
- A practice exam.
- Guidance to students and teachers on how the coursebook can be adapted to the needs of individual students and the variety of class types a teacher may encounter.

Table 1 gives basic information about the coursebooks reviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Main components</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td><em>New Insight into IELTS</em></td>
<td>Student’s book Workbook</td>
<td>Current level Band 6</td>
<td>Additional practice test available online – Includes full coverage of GT IELTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Objective IELTS—Intermediate</em></td>
<td>Student’s book Teacher’s book Workbook</td>
<td>Intermediate—for students aiming at Band 5.6 or 6</td>
<td>CD Rom with extra practice in language and skills – Includes some coverage of GT IELTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Objective IELTS—Advanced</em></td>
<td>Student’s book Teacher’s book Workbook</td>
<td>Advanced—for students aiming at Band 6.5 or 7</td>
<td>CD Rom with extra practice in language and skills – Includes some coverage of GT IELTS – Online support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>IELTS Graduation</em></td>
<td>Study skills book Teacher’s book</td>
<td>Current level Band 5.5 and above</td>
<td>For candidates taking Academic modules – Online support at <a href="http://www.onestopenglish.com">www.onestopenglish.com</a> provides IELTS-related activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson</td>
<td><em>IELTS Express Intermediate</em></td>
<td>Coursebook Teacher’s guide Workbook Video (speaking) DVD</td>
<td>Current level Band 4–5.5</td>
<td>For candidates taking Academic modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>IELTS Express Upper Intermediate</em></td>
<td>Coursebook Teacher’s guide Workbook Video (speaking) DVD</td>
<td>Current level Band 5 and above</td>
<td>For candidates taking Academic modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
<td><em>IELTS Masterclass</em></td>
<td>Student’s book Teacher’s book MultiROM</td>
<td>‘Will take students to the level required for university admission’</td>
<td>MultiROM with link to online test (can be done with or without support) – For candidates taking Academic modules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New insight into IELTS
(Cambridge University Press)

Most coursebooks for IELTS have a traditional topic-based structure, assuming that candidates will work through the book from beginning to end. This book takes a different approach to IELTS preparation, being divided into separate sections for Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. This allows a course to be tailored to the specific needs of a class or an individual, and will be particularly appropriate in cases where students have limited time and need a focused course. A teacher with students needing particular support in Academic Reading, for example (a common scenario), could focus on the seven sections developing reading skills and strategies and applying them to exam tasks. The other module where students often need additional support is Writing. Here candidates are given guidance on key areas for IELTS such as the need for the writer to understand what the question requires, establish a position, generate, support, and organize their ideas. The book would also be appropriate for a class of mixed GT and Academic candidates, as it provides substantial support for GT Reading and Writing as well as for the Academic modules.

The layout is accessible, with headings making it clear which activities are supporting general skills development and which relate specifically to the exam. Exam information is relevant, accurate, and up to date.

Summary: a book which is ideal for those teachers who have mixed IELTS classes of varying needs and levels, and which would also provide a teacher who is new to IELTS with clear information about the test and tasks. The clear introduction to exam technique would make it particularly suitable for short intensive courses or add-on courses, and it would also be a good choice for a course that is partly or wholly delivered on a self-access basis.

Objective IELTS Advanced
(Cambridge University Press)

Objective IELTS is a two-level IELTS course; Objective IELTS Intermediate was published in 2006 and targets students aiming at Bands 5.5 or 6. The higher level, Objective IELTS Advanced, targets students aiming at Bands 6.5–7. The coursebook covers both Academic and GT modules, although the main focus is on Academic. Topics are appropriate and challenging and would give candidates a good idea of what to expect in the exam itself. The double-column layout makes the pages quite dense, but unit structure is clear. Most units include Reading, Listening, and Speaking and there are also ten ‘Writing folders’ covering Academic and GT Writing tasks, which include discussion of style and tone, and analysis and assessment of sample answers. There are also ten ‘Test folders’ that offer useful guidance on common IELTS reading and listening tasks such as matching, and labelling diagrams and maps. Exam information is relevant and accurate, and the language syllabus is informed by the Cambridge Learner Corpus. There is a CD Rom with additional practice in language and skills.

Summary: a comprehensive course that would be an excellent choice for a class or individual aiming at a higher IELTS band (including bands above 7.5). The organization of the book also means it could easily be adapted for
IELTS Graduation
(Macmillan)

This is aimed at candidates taking the Academic version of IELTS. The coursebook consists of ten units, each of which includes practice for all four modules of the exam together with a language and vocabulary focus and a section on study skills. The book is attractively laid out and looks accessible. There are grammar and vocabulary reference sections at the back (although these are not mentioned in the Contents). The language sections would provide useful support to those students aiming at a higher IELTS score and cover relevant areas such as lexical cohesion and use of synonyms and parallel expressions. While the skills developed are relevant to the exam, precise details of tasks are not always accurate (for example Speaking Part 2 prompts on p. 81), and there is some uncertainty over task types (for example the Listening Matching task on p. 25 is in fact a true/false task rather than an example of the type of matching students will have to do in IELTS Listening, and the Listening task on p. 142 is an example of table completion, not note completion).

The Teacher’s Book gives basic procedures and answer keys, together with one extra page of activities for each unit.

There is also a Study Skills Book designed as a self-study course for the Academic modules. This links skills such as prediction, skimming, and scanning to specific exam tasks and is divided into separate sections for Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. The organization of the book could make it useful for a well-motivated student who is aware of his or her own needs, for example, one who needs to improve performance in one or two areas of the exam in order to achieve a higher band. It could also be used by a teacher to provide additional practice for students according to their individual needs. The book has a practice exam.

Summary: a useful preparation for stronger candidates in terms of language and skills, with plenty of resources, although minor details of tasks do not always reflect the exam.

Achieve IELTS 2
(Marshall Cavendish)

This is the higher level of Achieve IELTS 1, which was published in 2005. The book claims to ‘take students from Band 5.5 to 7.5’. The series focuses on the needs of candidates taking the Academic version of the exam, and takes a ‘student-centred approach to test preparation’, aiming not only to prepare the students for the IELTS test but also for their life in an academic setting after they have taken the test. It covers topics related to student experiences such as opening a bank account, student travel, and graduation as well as more common IELTS topics such as climate change and technology.

The 12 units each cover skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), language study, pronunciation, ‘expressions’ (mainly functions), and ‘Achieve IELTS’ (short exam tips). Language support is integrated across skills and exam tasks, but layout is sometimes
confusing, for example the Listening section on p. 57 has a box mentioning three different IELTS tasks, but one (table completion) does not appear at all in this section and another (multiple choice) does not follow exam format, where multiple-choice questions always have at least three options. The note completion task, like most in this book, does not contain features of notes common in IELTS tasks such as indentation and use of bullets, but is written and displayed as connected text, and the task itself is more dictation-like than the ones that students will encounter in the Listening test.

There is also a Practice Test Book (see below under ‘Supplementary materials’).

Summary: this would be a relevant introduction to academic life and to study skills for students hoping to study in an English-speaking country, particularly for those already in an English-speaking environment. It would be most useful for a fairly homogeneous class of students at the lower end of the range specified; a student aiming at Band 7 or higher would probably benefit from more advanced language input. It would be best used by a teacher who is fairly familiar with IELTS.

IELTS Express Intermediate/IELTS Express Upper Intermediate (Thomson)

A visually attractive and well-designed series in which the layout of the book clearly reflects its structure and allows easy navigation. The focus is on exam technique and skills development. Exam tasks are clearly labelled as such and are supported to develop the targeted skills. There are practical student-centred activities such as ideas for surveys to allow students to gain practical experience of the use of graphs, tables, and charts. Tips focus on key areas such as recognition of paraphrase and extending answers in speaking. The Teacher’s Book has many creative ideas for exploitation of the activities, and is one of the few coursebooks to acknowledge the challenge of mixed abilities in IELTS classes by adding ideas for additional support for weaker students, and extra challenges for stronger ones. It also provides information on marking criteria together with a link to the IELTS website, where public versions of the writing and speaking criteria are now available. The Workbook provides more work on skills and exam tasks, together with vocabulary and ‘language bites’ providing some information on grammar and functions.

The Introduction to IELTS Express Intermediate Coursebook gives details of how the book can be adapted for candidates taking either version of the test (Academic or GT). The Intermediate book includes sections for GT Writing, providing useful input as well as practice activities, for example input on reported speech is linked to a letter of complaint. Candidates taking the GT module might need extra input for the reading paper; although the book covers the task types, this is mainly done through academic texts. However, there is a practice test for GT Reading. There is a strong link between skills development and exam technique, for example reading work on building a mental map of a text leads on to a discussion of different ways in which information may be organized in academic texts, which in turn serves as an
introduction to the exam task of matching paragraph headings. Similarly, in developing skills for Academic Writing Task 1 (presenting information from graphs, diagrams, etc.) the presentation of bar charts and tables together on p. 21 is a useful way of showing students how the same information can be presented in different ways.

The *IELTS Express Upper Intermediate Coursebook* also provides a good link between skills development and exam tasks, even in listening, where in many other materials support is restricted to tips on task completion. For example, in Unit 8 students analyse how key information is marked in speech through word stress, pausing, and changes in pace. The ‘Writing summary’ at the end of the book gives a useful summary of agree/disagree versus thesis-led writing for Task 2, but other types of writing tasks (for example problem/solution) are not covered.

**Summary:** an excellent choice for an add-on class or a short course, and a good starting point for a teacher who has not previously prepared students for IELTS, providing useful and accurate information about the test. The *Teacher’s Book* is a particular strength. Exam tasks are clearly linked to academic skills. It would work well on its own for students whose level of language is already more or less at the required level but who require training in skills and exam technique, or could be supplemented with additional language work for students at lower levels.

**IELTS Masterclass** *(Oxford University Press)*

This does not specify a level but seems to be targeted at candidates aiming at about a Band 6.5. The guide to IELTS at the beginning of the coursebook covers the Academic version only and there is no mention of GT. The book has 14 units giving a good coverage of basic IELTS topic areas and each including the four skills modules. Reading and listening texts have follow-up activities on content and language as well as exam tasks. There are a limited number of tips on exam technique, mostly giving fairly basic advice, for example ‘read texts quickly to get a general idea of what they are about’. Each unit has a section on ‘Language for writing’, which focuses on a key language area for the type of writing covered in the unit, for example work on conditionals leads into a writing task requiring argument and hypothesis. The ‘Help yourself’ page at the end of each unit covers a variety of topics such as logical thinking, English spelling, and word stress. There is also a MultiROM providing some additional information and exercises on vocabulary, pronunciation, and study skills (for example how to use search engines for information on common topics) together with a link to additional speaking materials and practice tests on the website (www.oxfordenglishtesting.com).

**Summary:** a good choice for a class where the development of writing skills is a priority.
Table 2 gives basic information about the coursebooks reviewed.

**TABLE 2 Supplementary materials reviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language support</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td><em>Cambridge Grammar for IELTS</em></td>
<td>Diana Hopkins with Pauline Cullen</td>
<td>No level given, but best for intermediate/upper intermediate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language support</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td><em>Cambridge Vocabulary for IELTS</em></td>
<td>Pauline Cullen</td>
<td>B2–C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language support</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td><em>Common Mistakes at IELTS Intermediate</em></td>
<td>Pauline Cullen</td>
<td>Band 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language support</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td><em>Common Mistakes at IELTS Advanced</em></td>
<td>Julie Moore</td>
<td>Bands 7 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>Check your Vocabulary for IELTS</em></td>
<td>Rawdon Wyatt</td>
<td>Intermediate/upper intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>Improve your IELTS Reading Skills</em></td>
<td>Sam McCarter and Norman Whitby</td>
<td>No level specified but appropriate for candidates aiming at Band 6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>Improve your IELTS Writing Skills</em></td>
<td>Sam McCarter and Norman Whitby</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills development</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>Improve your IELTS Listening and Speaking Skills</em></td>
<td>Sam McCarter and Barry Cusack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam technique and practice tests</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>Tips for IELTS</em></td>
<td>Sam McCarter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam technique and practice tests</td>
<td>Macmillan</td>
<td><em>IELTS Testbuilder 2</em></td>
<td>Sam McCarter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam technique and practice tests</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
<td><em>Cambridge IELTS 7</em></td>
<td>Sam McCarter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam technique and practice tests</td>
<td>Marshall Cavendish</td>
<td><em>Achieve IELTS Practice Test Book</em></td>
<td>Anthea Bazin, Elaine Boyd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication games and activities</td>
<td>Delta</td>
<td><em>IELTS Resource Pack</em></td>
<td>Jon Marks</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the wide variation in the needs and levels of IELTS candidates, supplementary materials are clearly an important resource. These can be divided into materials providing language support, those providing support in the four skills, those targeting exam technique, including books of practice tests, and books of communication games and activities.

**Language support**  
*Cambridge Grammar for IELTS*  
(Cambridge University Press)

This claims to cover ‘the grammar you need to be successful in the test’. It would be most useful for students at intermediate and upper intermediate level. The book could be used by students on a self-access basis or by teachers to supplement other material. There is a straightforward and useful diagnostic test at the beginning. The majority of the structures covered are those that would be found in a general English coursebook at this level, although the last five units focus on language which is more academic, for example markers of attitude and nominalization.
Each unit is divided into four parts: an initial listening activity introducing the target language in context, a grammar explanation, focused grammar practice activity, and an IELTS task in test format (Academic and GT).

**Summary**: a useful resource for lower level candidates, although those aiming at above a Band 6 may need to use it selectively, focusing on the later units.

This provides vocabulary input and practice for candidates at CEFR level B2 and C1. The main part of the book consists of 20 topic-based units covering IELTS-related topics such as lifestyles, communication, technology, energy, and the media. Each unit includes vocabulary exercises based on materials similar to those found in the different modules of the exam, together with a pronunciation focus and a test practice activity. The exam practice activities cover all modules and a wide range of tasks, and would in themselves provide excellent preparation for the exam. The last five units cover vocabulary study skills and key vocabulary for the Academic and GT modules.

The topic-based presentation means that the vocabulary focused on tends to be generally topic related rather than more general terms which are high frequency in a number of different academic topics. In order to cope with the reading load for Academic Reading in particular, candidates need to gain familiarity with words and phrases that are likely to recur in many different contexts. Many teachers and candidates are already familiar with the *Academic Word List* developed by Averil Coxhead at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, which covers high-frequency academic vocabulary items such as ‘incidence’, ‘criteria’, and ‘issues’. It might have been useful to include some work on this type of vocabulary, for example its use in collocations such as ‘Another area of concern is the high incidence of . . .’, ‘. . . have to meet strict criteria’, ‘Major issues in this area were . . .’.

**Summary**: useful input for vocabulary development and exam skills though the focus is on general topic-based language rather than academic language.

These short books each contain 30 units based on common errors made by IELTS candidates collected from the Cambridge Learner Corpus. Each unit has one page beginning with a diagnostic activity, followed by a brief grammar explanation, an illustrated correction activity, and a final practice exercise. After every three units, there is a test, which provides tasks related to typical content of IELTS modules, focusing on the language covered.

*Common Mistakes at IELTS Intermediate and How to Avoid Them* is based on errors made by Band 5 candidates. They include form and use of the passive, the language of charts and figures, and preposition use. *Common Mistakes at IELTS Advanced* is based on analysis of Band 7 scripts and covers spelling and punctuation problems at that level as well as language of statistics and commonly confused nouns and verbs.
**Summary:** The books are an accessible and attractive remedial aid, particularly for those students who need to improve their range and accuracy of grammar and vocabulary for the Speaking and Writing modules.

*Check Your Vocabulary for IELTS (Macmillan)*

This is a new edition of the workbook originally published in 2003. It contains 52 units focusing on functions, notions, and language areas, followed by 46 pages of topic-specific vocabulary on general IELTS-related topics such as education, the media, and the environment. The book is targeted at intermediate and upper intermediate learners and would probably be appropriate for those aiming at a Band 6.5 or below. Each unit has one or several activities. The majority of these are based on isolated sentences but there are also some text-based activities, including exercises such as gapped essays.

**Summary:** A popular resource which is easy for students to use on their own, but which is less closely related to the exam in the vocabulary selected and the activities used than some of the other materials available.

*Skills development Improve Your IELTS Skills (Macmillan)*

This is a series of three skills books aimed at students studying on their own or with a teacher. Each book has ten topic-based units. No level is specified but the books appear suitable for candidates aiming at around Band 6.5.

*Improve Your IELTS Reading Skills* is aimed at students taking the Academic module. It relates reading tasks to skills and examines reading items in detail, through, for example, step by step analysis of the language used in the stems of multiple-choice questions and its relation to the focus of the item. For some analytic and well-motivated candidates, this may be a useful approach, but the degree of abstraction may put off candidates who prefer to approach a text through focus on the meaning of the text rather than on analysis of the questions (for example the very complex flow chart on how to decide between True, False, and Not Given on p. 16 may make students even more worried about the activity). There is a useful vocabulary focus at the end of each unit.

*Improve Your IELTS Writing Skills* is also for students taking the Academic Writing module. Each unit provides support for Task 1 and Task 2, as well as a practice test. The first unit provides a useful introduction to different types of Task 2 question, including essays describing problems and solutions—a type often omitted from practice material—as well as advantages/disadvantages and thesis-led approaches. Each unit includes detailed language work, and a candidate who worked though the book would be very well prepared for the Writing module in terms of language and organization. Input on content is also provided through short texts. Sample answers are provided together with comments but little training is provided in self-evaluation and it would be useful to have a little more input regarding the general criteria by which the work is evaluated.

*Improve Your IELTS Listening and Speaking Skills* could be used by candidates preparing for either the Academic or GT version of IELTS. Each unit begins with a section called ‘Topic talk’ which provides input on topic and language. This leads on to more focused work on listening and speaking skills and to...
exam practice tasks. The book has some excellent support for candidates taking these modules. In Unit 6, for example, there is a very useful section on understanding layout leading on to a Listening note completion task. Awareness of the way in which layout features may contribute to meaning is an important skill for Listening and Reading modules and is often ignored in preparation materials.

Summary: the materials provide thorough preparation in the language and skills required for IELTS. They may be rather dense for some students to use on their own but provide a useful resource for teachers to select from.

Exam technique and practice tests

Tips for IELTS
(Macmillan)

This short book is a list of tips for each part of the exam. These mainly stand alone rather than being supported by reference to example texts or questions. There is some valuable advice but 60 pages of unalleviated tips are quite daunting even for a teacher already familiar with IELTS.

There is detailed advice on skimming and scanning: these are essential skills for the Reading paper but the techniques described may be rather ambitious for most candidates. There is no reference to dealing with short-answer questions in the discussion of reading tasks. This is quite a common item type, and one where candidates need advice to reassure them that an answer of, say, one word may be all that is required. The input on Writing is probably the most useful section; there are detailed lists of possible language exponents for different types of Task 1 input. However, probably there should be some mention of the need for candidates to establish and maintain a position in the Golden Rules for Task 2: candidates will not get high marks unless they do this. The Listening section is quite confusing—several of these tips seem to relate more to Writing than to Listening, for example ‘Check for mistakes and sense at the end of each paragraph. This will also train you to look back as you write rather than just going forward’ (p. 43). In Listening, candidates never have to write more than three words for any answer, and usually fewer. There is also some confusion over item types; for example a section under the heading ‘Summaries’ seems to relate to note-taking tasks.

IELTS Testbuilder 2
(Macmillan)

This provides four complete practice tests for the Academic module. There is extensive and detailed support for each part of each test, integrated with the test. This may sometimes add a level of processing for the candidate, which is above that required by the item itself, but may also be a useful guide to the teacher. Page 7 gives a useful guide to completing answer sheets. There is a good variety of item types and content and level are appropriate for IELTS.

NB. The majority of Listening productive tasks here specify a word limit of three words. It would have been useful for candidates to have more practice with producing one-word answers, which are frequently required.

Achieve IELTS Practice Tests
(Marshall Cavendish)

This provides four practice tests covering all major task types in accurate exam format. An introduction and tips for each part of the exam are given at the beginning. This provides useful basic information on areas such as the relationship between the order of items and the order of information in the
text, and the way in which answers should be given. (However, it is not true that if candidates write a synonym instead of the word heard for Listening, they will lose the mark. In fact, either type of answer would be accepted in a productive Listening task—the word from the text or a synonym.) Sample answers are provided but there is no information on marking criteria.

**Cambridge IELTS 7**
(Cambridge University Press)

This contains four complete tests for Academic candidates plus Reading and Writing modules for GT candidates. It also has an introduction to each module together with a detailed description (on p. 8) of the scoring system used. This is a useful reference for teachers who should make sure that their students are aware, for example, of the need to stick to word limits (often one or two words). The Introduction also tells teachers and students about the location of the public versions of the band descriptors on the website (www.ielts.org). Some sample answers are authentic and are commented on by an IELTS examiner, while others are written by an examiner.

**Communication games and activities**
IELTS Resource Pack
(Delta Publishing)

However focused and well-motivated IELTS candidates are, a course still needs variety of activity, pace, and interaction. This book consists of a collection of photocopiable games, activities, and practice tests for IELTS preparation classes. Each activity is related to a specific module of IELTS. The activities are all interactive, involving either whole-class interaction or pair work.

The activities use techniques such as competition, jigsaw reading, and student-generated questions to encourage students to use language and ideas related to the test communicatively. They provide intensive use of language and excellent practice in the language and skills needed for IELTS, and would also help students to generate ideas for writing and speaking. Since the activities all involve oral interaction, they also provide integrated tasks where students are improving their speaking skills, for example, when discussing a reading text.

**Conclusion**

Most of these materials provide a good introduction to the overall topics candidates are likely to meet when they take IELTS, although the treatment of these topics is often broader than the test itself. However, this is not necessarily a problem; a text discussing, for example, main methods of energy conservation will provide ideas and vocabulary to help students who read or hear a text on a more specific aspect of the topic in the test itself.

There is considerable variation between the balance of exam-related tips and support, and the development of the underlying skills. Even within the same books, there is often a difference in approach, with greater attention often being paid to skills development in Speaking and Writing, and to exam technique in Reading and Listening. Teachers therefore need to be aware of the particular needs of their students when selecting materials. None of these materials (apart from the Cambridge University Press book of practice tests IELTS 7) refer to the band descriptors for Speaking and Writing available to the public on www.ielts.org.

Providing the right balance between skills development, language input, and exam technique is a key need for a teacher or for an individual working on his or her own. The majority of IELTS coursebooks still assume
a lockstep approach, although, as we have seen, this may not be the best solution in many cases. In the majority of materials reviewed, there is not much to help teachers or students to identify specific needs, goals, and activities in relation to the exam. Most coursebooks follow a traditional approach with little reference to the common situations in which teachers find themselves when preparing for IELTS. Given the continued growth of the candidature and the possibility for variation in modes of delivery offered by technological development, it would be exciting to think about alternative ways in which IELTS students could be prepared not only to take the test itself, but also to be prepared for their journeys into international education and employment.

References
The IELTS website: http://www.ielts.org

The reviewer
Judith Wilson has worked as a teacher and teacher trainer in schools and universities in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, and has also published exam preparation materials for Preliminary English Test, First Certificate in English, Certificate of Proficiency in English, and IELTS. She now works as a freelance writer and exam consultant.