

Monday, February 29, 2016

IELTS Reading: 'paragraph headings' keywords

Over the weekend I ran an IELTS preparation course here in Manchester. We did some good work on 'paragraph headings' questions, and one of the exercises that we used was test 3, passage 2 in Cambridge IELTS book 5.

Here are the keywords from the 'paragraph headings' section in that test:

Keywords in headings	Similar words in the passage
Interrupting a natural process	the dams hold back sediment that used to flow down the river
Effects of irrigation on sedimentation	water in irrigation canals is still or slow-moving and thus cannot carry sediment
The threat to food production	poisons can enter the food chain, affecting the productivity of fishing and farming
Looking at the long-term impact	the impact this could have... in the long term an alternative process may have to be used

Note: I always recommend doing paragraph matching questions last. They are much easier if you are already familiar with the passage, having done other question sections first.

Monday, February 08, 2016

IELTS Reading: another keyword table

Over the weekend I ran an IELTS preparation course here in Manchester. One of the reading exercises that we did came from Cambridge 5 (test 1, passage 2). The topic of the passage was a famous psychology experiment.

My students found the 'which paragraph contains?' exercise particularly tricky. Here's a keyword table for that exercise:

Keywords in questions	Similar words in the passage
a biological explanation	a sociobiologist might claim that...
the explanation Milgram gave	Milgram told each volunteer that...
the identity of the pupils	the 'pupil' was in reality an actor
expected statistical outcome	anticipated that only four per cent
the aim of sociobiological study	the problem of sociobiology - to discover...
persuaded subjects to continue	"You must go on"

Note:

Psychology is quite a common topic in the reading test. If you're interested in this topic, try reading about the Stanford prison experiment and John Bowlby's Attachment theory.

Monday, December 14, 2015

IELTS Reading: underline key words

Hopefully you do this already, but it's worth pointing out why underlining is so important when you're doing an IELTS reading test. I tell my students to underline the main words in the question, then underline any similar words that they find as they read the passage.

There are 3 reasons why underlining is useful:

- 1 It encourages you to use the [keyword technique](#) to find the answers.
- 2 You don't lose your place in the passage when you're turning pages to check between the question and the text.
- 3 The same information may be relevant for a later question (e.g. when you do a 'paragraph headings' section last).

I can always tell when students have worked hard on a reading paper by the amount of underlining or highlighting they have done. If you don't usually underline things, start now!

Monday, November 23, 2015

IELTS Reading: similar words

Here are some of the key words and phrases that helped my students to get the answers to reading test 4.1 in Cambridge IELTS book 7:

Keywords in questions	Similar words in the text
it is generally believed	the conventional picture is
large numbers of people	thousands of slaves
it was possible to use kites	could have used kites
to raise very heavy stones	to lift massive stones
large pieces of	massive blocks of
use the energy of the wind	harnessing the wind
an object which resembled	artefact looks uncannily like
used for sending messages	using them to deliver messages

uncannily: means strangely or extraordinarily.

Monday, November 02, 2015

IELTS Reading: 6 tips

How can you improve your reading? Here are 6 tips:

- 4 If you want to improve your reading, the first thing to do is read a lot.
There are no shortcuts or secret techniques; you will only improve with time and practice.
 - 5 Anything you read in English is good practice, so read about subjects that interest you. Try to enjoy reading in English.
 - 6 English is the most used language on the Internet. Whenever you search for information on the net, try searching in English first.
 - 7 Remember that "understanding is not the same as using". Keep a notebook with useful words and phrases that you find when you're reading, and try using them in your own sentences.
 - 8 Apart from reading things that interest you, you also need to read lots of IELTS passages. If you've done all of the tests in the Cambridge books, read the passages again without doing the questions. Use a dictionary, take notes, and try to fully understand each passage.
 - 9 Another way to use the Cambridge tests is to look at the correct answers to each question first. Then, your task is to find out why those answers are correct by analysing the passage carefully and finding the 'keywords'.
- I'm sure you can think of other suggestions. Be creative with your reading practice, try to enjoy the learning process, and trust that you will improve if you persist.

Monday, October 26, 2015

IELTS Reading: when are the answers in order?

For the following question types, the answers are **usually** (almost always) in order in the passage:

- 10 All types of gap-fill (sentences, summaries, diagrams etc.)
- 11 True, false, not given
- 12 Yes, no, not given
- 13 Multiple choice
- 14 Matching sentence endings
- 15 'Short answer' questions

However, answers to the following question types are **never** in order:

- 1 Matching paragraph headings
 - 2 Which paragraph contains the information?
- Matching names with statements or information

Monday, October 19, 2015

IELTS Reading: are you seeing the pattern?

Over the weekend I ran an IELTS preparation course. After a full morning of IELTS reading work, one of my students said this: "I'm starting to see the pattern."

So, what pattern was he talking about? The 'keyword' pattern.

Here's an example from one of the tests that we worked through:

Keywords in questions	Similar words in the passage
unpredictably	erratically
two decades ago	20 years ago
rainfall	precipitation
extended	longer
building of homes	construction of homes
open space has diminished	what was open space is now residential
mishandling fire containment	bungling allowed fires to spread
citizens and government groups	government officials and residents

The more practice you do, the better you'll get at finding the answers by recognising the similar 'keywords' in the questions and in the passages. The IELTS reading test really does get easier as you get used to seeing this pattern.

Monday, September 28, 2015

IELTS Reading: techniques

In case you haven't seen them before, here are my six main tips for IELTS reading. Notice that 'skimming and scanning' are not on the list - it's usually best to read at normal speed.

- “Keyword” technique: search for words in the passage that have the same meaning as words in the question
- Always underline keywords in the questions and passage - this helps you to search
- Go straight to the first question. Don't read the whole passage or all of the questions first
- Most questions are in order in the passage
- Time is a big problem in IELTS reading - move on quickly if you find one question difficult: miss it, and return to it later
- Some questions are easier to search for, usually those that contain numbers, names or distinctive words