

# Teaching IELTS Speaking: Interactive Classroom Activities

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## The big list of useful phrases for IELTS Speaking Part One

*The most useful phrases are top of each section. Phrases in italics and brackets () with NOT are not good in this part of the exam (and sometimes are not good English).*

### Phrases for talking about your name

“(My name is... but) please call me... (It means.../ It’s short for.../ It comes from...)”

“It is pronounced... (like.../ as in...) (but some people also pronounce it as...)”

“(My real name is... but) everyone calls me... (because...)”

“(Officially I’m... but) I’m known as...”

“People call me PJ. It stands for...”

### Checking/ Clarifying phrases (when the meaning of the question isn’t clear, etc)

“Sorry (I still don’t understand,) can you rephrase the question?”

“Sorry, (just to check) are you asking... (or...)?”

“Sorry, could you say that again (a little more slowly)?”

“Sorry, could you repeat the first/ middle/ last part of the question?”

“(Can I just check?) Should I talk about... (or...)?”

“If I understand (correctly), you want me to tell you...?”

“Can I talk about...?”

“Sorry, I didn’t (really) catch the last part/ the middle part/ the last word/...”

“So, you want to know...?”

“Sorry, what does... mean?”

“I’m afraid I’m (still) not (quite) sure what the question means.”

“So, does that mean I can talk about...?”

“Does that mean...?”

“(By.../ When you say...,) do you mean...?”

“I’m afraid I didn’t understand the last word/ the last part of the question.”

“Sorry but I’ve never heard of...”

“I’m afraid I’ve never come across the word... before.”

“(At the end of the question) you said... What does that mean?”

“So, the question is what do I...?”

“Sorry, I’m not familiar with the word...”

“Could you say that another way?”

“I’m afraid I’m not clear if you are asking... or...”

*(NOT “Sorry, what means...?” X)*

*(NOT “What?” X)*

*(NOT “I can’t understand you” X)*

*(NOT “I can’t understand what you are asking me” X)*

*(NOT “Sorry, please rephrase the question” X)*

*(NOT “Please repeat the question” X)*

*(NOT “I’m afraid but I’m still not quite sure what the question means.” X)*

### Answering questions whose meanings aren’t 100% clear phrases

“It depends what you mean by ‘...’, but...”

“I don’t know if this is what you are asking, but...”

“I guess you want to know..., in which case...”

“If ‘...’ means..., then...”

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## Commenting on the (mis)match between the question and your situation

"It's funny you should ask me that, because..."

"Actually (in my case),..."

"... not... exactly, but..."

"It's so strange that you asked me that, because..."

"There's no real... However,..."

"I don't think '...' is the right word for it, but..."

"I wouldn't describe it as '...', although..."

"Neither, really."

"The nearest thing to..."

"Can I talk about ... instead? (I don't really remember much about...)"

"Sorry but that question doesn't really make sense for me, due to..."

"As a matter of fact,..."

"Can I pick a third option?"

"I'm afraid I can't (really/ exactly) answer that question because..., but..."

(NOT "I'm afraid I can't answer that question." X)

## Other commenting on the question phrases (when it's challenging, unusual, etc)

"That's a tricky one"

"No one's (ever) asked me that before"

"I've never thought about that before"

"That's an interesting question"

"It's difficult to choose just one (...), but I guess..."

"That's quite complicated, actually"

## Vague answers/ Weak answers

"As far as I remember,..."

"I don't remember (exactly), but..."

"It's difficult to say for sure, but..."

"(It was a long time ago, but) I guess/ I reckon..."

"something like/ around/ approximately/ more or less/ about..."

"..., or something like that (anyway)"

"I don't remember it (myself), but from what I've been told (by my parents/ by...),..."

"Off the top of my head,..."

"It's in the region of..."

"Don't quote me on this, but..."

"If you asked me the same thing tomorrow, I'd probably have a different answer, but..."

"The only thing I can recall is..."

"... or something of that sort."

## Strong language/ Strong answers

"To be frank,..." / "Frankly,..."

"To be (perfectly) honest,..."

"I would never say this to his/ her face, but..."

"(Just) between you and me,..."

"I wouldn't (usually) say this in public, but..."

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## **(Other) thinking aloud phrases/ filling silence phrases**

"Hmmm let me think/ let me see"

"I'm not sure how well I can explain this (in English), but..."

"How can I best answer that question? Well..."

"How can I (best) say this in English? Well..."

"What's the best way to explain? Well..."

"I'm not sure the (exact/ proper) English word/ English expression, but..."

"(If you ask me) I'd (probably/ have to) say that..."

"I'm just trying to remember."

## **Talking about likes and dislikes/ preferences phrases**

"I (really/ absolutely/ totally) detest/ loathe..."

"I (absolutely/ really) love/ adore..."

"My (all-time/ least) favourite..."

"I'm (really) into..."

"I don't really like..."

"I'm a (great/ huge/ obsessive) fan of..."

"I'm (quite/ very/ not so) fond of..."

"I don't (really) mind..."

"I'm a (total/ complete/ bit of a)... fanatic/ geek/ obsessive."

"I (obsessively) follow..."

"I don't have any strong feelings about... (one way or the other)."

"My most hated..."

"I (especially/ really/ quite) like..."

"I'm (quite/ very/ extremely) interested in..."

"I (really) enjoy"

"I'm (completely) fed up with..."

*(NOT "I absolutely like..." X)*

*(NOT "My most favourite ... is..." X)*

## **Explaining abilities/ skills/ strengths and weaknesses phrases**

"I'm (especially/ incredibly/ extremely/ really/ pretty/ fairly) good/ bad at..."

"I'm (absolutely/ completely/ totally) excellent/ terrible/ awful at..."

"I can't get my head around..."

"I tried... but it was hopeless"

"... is my chosen specialist subject"

"... is my party trick"

"I'll (probably) never get the hang of..."

"... is (totally) beyond me"

"Everyone but me seems to be able to..."

## **Talking about habits/ routines phrases**

"I always/ without fail/ almost always/ generally/ typically/ regularly/ very often/ quite often/ rarely/ hardly ever/ very seldom/ occasionally..."

"I spend (quite) a lot of time..."

"On my days off..."

"In the evening(s)..."

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“once every two weeks/ once every three months/ ... every ... .s”

“once a month or so/ ... a ... or so”

“When(ever) I have time/ get the chance/ can,...”

“I don't have a lot of time for...”

“every other day/ week/ month”

“After work/ school,...”

“In an average day/ week/ month/ year,...”

“On average,...”

“In general,...”

*(NOT “once per a week” X)*

*(NOT “once a two weeks” X)*

## **Talking about now phrases**

“at the moment”/ “currently”/ “presently”/ “(right) now”/ “at this very moment”/ “as we speak”

*(NOT “at that moment” X)*

*(NOT “at this moment” X)*

## **Talking about the distant past phrases**

“When I was a baby/ a toddler/ a pre-schooler/ a (young) child/ a tween/ a teenager/ a.....”

“When I was in my (early/ mid/ late) teens/ twenties/ thirties/ ... .s,...”

“When I was in (the first year of/ the ... year of) primary school/ kindergarten/ .....”

“The first time I (ever)...”/ “I first...”

“For as long as I can remember,...”/ “As far back as I can remember,...”

“This was (well) before I remember, but...”

*(NOT “When I was young child, ...” X)*

## **Talking about the recent past phrases**

“the day before yesterday”/ “the week before last”/ “the... before...”

“I last...”/ “The last time I...”

“(just/ only) a couple of days ago/ the other day”

“in the last few days”

“recently”

“(early) this morning”

“(just) last night/ yesterday evening”

*(NOT “a couple of days before” X)*

## **Talking about experiences/ Linking the past and present phrases**

“I have... once or twice/ a couple of times/ several times/ quite a few times/ more times than I can count/ ... times”

“I haven't... for ages.”

“In the last few days/ weeks/ months,...”

“I have never (ever)...”

“I've got used to...”

*(NOT “I have ever...” X)*

## **Talking about future arrangements (appointments, dates, etc) phrases**

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"I'm meeting up with some friends and..." / "I'm ...ing with ... (and...)"

"I've (already) arranged to..."

"I have a date/ a meeting/ an appointment with... at... on..."

(NOT "I have an appointment with some friends to..." X)

(NOT "I will..." X)

## Talking about your plans phrases

"I'm (probably) going to..."

"I'm planning to..."

"I'm thinking about/ I'm considering..."

"I've decided to..."

(NOT "I have a plan to..." X)

(NOT "I'm thinking to..." X)

## Talking about desires phrases

"I'd (really) like to..." / "I'd (really) love to..."

"What I (really) want to do is..."

"My dream is to..."

"I have my heart set on..."

## Talking about predictions phrases

"(It's difficult to predict but) I imagine/ I guess..."

"I may (well)/ might (well)..."

"I'll probably..."

"I (confidently/ fully) expect to (be able to)..."

"I could possibly..."

"Looking into my crystal ball, I see..."

(NOT "I can possibly..." X)

(NOT "I will possibly..." X)

(NOT "I would..." X)

## Talking about the near future phrases

"the day after tomorrow" / "the week after next" / "the... after..."

"in the next couple of days/ few days/ ... days"

"in the (very) near future"

"any day now"

"(first thing) tomorrow morning"

"as soon as this test finishes"

"later (today)"

"(sometime/ very) soon"

"by the end of this week/ by the end of..."

(NOT "a couple of days after" X)

(NOT "a couple of days later" X)

(NOT "at 2050" X)

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## Talking about the distant future phrases

“by the time I retire”

“someday”/ “sometime”/ “one day”

“in 20...”

“in the distant future”

“when I am old”

“This won’t happen for ages (if ever), but...”

## Speculating/ Hypothesising/ Imagining (alternative universes, etc) phrases

“If things were different,...”/ “If things had been different,...”

“In a perfect world/ In an ideal world,...”

“If I could (have)...”

“If I had(n’t) (had to)...”

“... I would (have)...”

## (More natural/ interesting) answers to yes/ no questions (without yes or no)

“Generally not.”/ “Not usually.”

“Not (so) much.”/ “Not (so) often.”

“I suppose so.”

“It depends (on...)”.

“(Yeah,) I guess.”

“Sure (, why not?)”

“Sort of.”/ “Kind of.”/ “Kinda.”

“That’s what I’ve been told.”/ “That’s what I’ve heard.”

“Not exactly.”

“Not right now.”

“Hardly (at all/ ever).”

“Fairly.”/ “Somewhat.”/ “Quite a lot.”

“Not as far as I remember.”

“Not as much as...”/ “Not like...”

“Not at all.”/ “Never.”

“I wouldn’t say...”

“Sometimes.”/ “From time to time.”

“Not according to...”

“Very.”/ “Extremely.”/ “(Quite) a lot.”

“Well, actually...”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call it...”

“Of course (not).”

“Probably (not).”

“Some people might say that.”

“Not if I can help it.”

“Maybe (someday).”

“You could say that.”

“As long as...”/ “Only if...”/ “Only when...”/ “Providing...”

“I may well.”

“Apart from...”

“I try to avoid it if I can.”

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“More or less.”  
“Not by... standards.”  
“Not compared to...”  
“Not that you’d notice.”  
“Nothing springs to mind.”  
“Only if you compare it to...”/ “Only in comparison to...”  
“Only in so far as...”  
“That’s sometimes the case.”  
“No way!”  
“Are you kidding?”  
“Not even once.”

## **Giving reasons phrases**

“I’m not really sure why, but perhaps it’s because...”  
“The (chief/ main) reason why (I feel that way) is...”  
“This is (almost certainly) because...”  
“... so I...”  
“This is (probably) due to...”  
“in order to...”  
“so that...”  
“for some reason or the other”

## **Explaining (more/ things that the examiner might not know or understand) phrases**

“It’s difficult to explain (in English/ even in my own language), but...”  
“The (direct/ literal/ usual/ best) translation is...”  
“... which is a kind of/ a sort of...”  
“In other words, ...”  
“That is to say...”  
“To put that another way, ...”  
“i.e., ...”  
“There is a word in my language...”  
“There is something in my country which we call...”  
“..., which can be translated as...”  
“which is (a bit) like...”  
“which looks/ smells/ tastes/ feels (something) like...”  
“In my language, we say..., which means something like...”  
“It’s similar to..., but...”  
“... which I would define as...”

## **Changing your mind/ Correcting wrong information phrases**

“Sorry, I meant to say...”  
“Come to think of, it’s actually...”  
“Ah no, that’s wrong. In reality, ...”

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## Ending (long) answers phrases

“and so on”

“and stuff like that”

“and that kind of thing”

“I could go on (but you get the general idea)”

“Does that answer your question?”

“I think that (about/ more or less/ almost) covers it”

“That’s the main thing”

“etcetera”

“Is that what you wanted to know?”

(NOT “Thank you for listening” X)

(NOT “That’s the end of my answer” X)

(NOT “That’s all” X)

## Talking about your education phrases

“I graduated from....”

“I major(ed) in...”

“I’m studying for...”

“I was fairly good at....”

“I didn’t go to...”

“I dropped (out of)....”

## Talking about places (hometown, accommodation, etc) phrases

“I come from a small village/ medium-sized town/ big city in...”

“My hometown is about ... from ....”

“I grew up on the outskirts of...”

“I was brought up...”

“I live on the ... floor of ...”

“I live with...”

“I moved out of my family home when I was...”

“I want to move...”

“I have lived most of my life...”

“I’m moving into a new....”

“I’d like to buy my own place...”

“I share(d) a flat with...”

“I live in the suburbs of....”

“I’m looking for a place in...”

## Talking about people/ relationships phrases

“(When it comes to...,) I take after my father/ mother/ grand....”

“I really look like.... We have almost the same ....”

“My personality is similar to my...”

“I didn’t get on/ get along (well) with...”



## **Talking about festivals and celebrations phrases**

“The most famous festival is...”  
“It takes place...”  
“I take part in ... (almost) every ...”  
“The festival lasts for...”  
“Special costumes are worn (by...)”  
“... get presents from ...”

## **Talking about transport and travel phrases**

“I usually travel by...”  
“I took ... from ... to ...”  
“It takes .... minutes/ hours”

## **Talking about movies and TV phrases**

“It’s on Channel... at ... o’clock on ...days.”  
“My favourite movie was directed by...”  
“It’s based on...”  
“It’s a sequel/ prequel to...”

## **Talking about music phrases**

“I usually listen to...”  
“(Most of) my favourite music is...”  
“It was a (big) hit...”  
“I can play the... (fairly well/ very well/ a little/ but quite badly).”  
“It was in the top ten/ twenty/ thirty...”

## **Talking about your work phrases**

“I’m responsible for...”  
“I’m in (joint) charge of...”  
“I’m working on... at the moment.”  
“I’m just... (but I also have a side job, which is...)”  
“I report to...”

## **Talking about your free time/ leisure/ hobbies phrases**

“I spend (some of/ much of/ most of) my free time...”  
“I don’t have any actual hobbies, but...”  
“I go out for...”  
“I’d (quite/ really) like to take up...”