

## What is the difference between IELTS and OET?

Both [IELTS](#) (International English Language Testing System) and [OET](#) (Occupational English Test) are used to test the English language of healthcare professionals in different parts of the world.

They are chosen by regulatory bodies to ensure doctors, nurses and other professions have sufficient language skills to communicate at a high level with patients and colleagues, and so ensure safe and effective care.

**There are a number of similarities between the two tests.**

1. Each one consists of four sub-tests, one for each skill: reading, listening, writing and speaking.
2. A test takes place on one day.
3. There is no pass/fail, but a graded score – different institutions need test takers to achieve different scores.
4. In practice, the required scores in the two tests for professions such as nurses are for similar levels of language skill when measured on the [Common European Framework of Reference](#).
5. Both tests were developed in the late 1980s and are part-owned by Cambridge Assessment English. IELTS ownership is shared with IDP and the British Council. OET ownership is shared with Boxhill Assessment.

**However, that's where the similarities end. As you can see from the below, they are quite different tests in many ways.**

### 1. Content

IELTS tests academic English – at least the version of IELTS used by Higher Education institutions and healthcare regulatory bodies around the world. This includes the ability to write essays, follow lectures, understand academic articles and discuss a wide range of topics, from the environment to education to social trends to cultural values.

OET tests healthcare English, including the ability to communicate effectively in medical scenarios, write a referral letter, understand a patient consultation, or follow a text taken from a medical journal.

### 2. Versions

IELTS offers 2 versions of the test – Academic as described, and General Training, used by organisations to test the more general language considered more appropriate for immigration or vocational purposes. The Listening and Speaking sections are the same for both. The Academic Reading and Writing is more geared to Higher Education than the General Training.

OET offers 12 versions of the test for different healthcare professions; nurses, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, optometrists, podiatrists, occupational therapists, vets, speech pathologists, dieticians, physiotherapists, and radiographers. The Reading and Listening sections are the same for both. The Speaking and Writing sections are tailored to the specific scenarios in which each profession uses English.



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### 3. Preparation requirements

Preparing for IELTS involves learning huge amounts of vocabulary on a wide range of academic subjects so test takers are prepared to read academic texts quickly and effectively, understand lectures and discussions, talk about abstract questions and give opinions in detail. Test takers need to learn how to write reports on a variety of data and a range of essay types. Written texts need to be at an advanced level and so include complex structures and grammar. Learning a set of key exam techniques is also crucial.

Preparing for OET involves learning a wide range of healthcare-related and profession-specific language, so test takers are able to follow, engage with and participate in a variety of clinical scenarios, as well as understand medical texts and talks. They need to be able to write a healthcare-related letter, such as a referral letter, at an advanced level. They need to acquire a range of exam techniques so they can work quickly and effectively in the test.

As a result, preparation courses for the two tests follow very different pathways and use very different materials.

### 4. Scoring

IELTS is marked out of 9, with a separate score for each paper. Half marks are awarded as part of this. OET is graded from A (best) to E.

Healthcare regulatory bodies which use both exams to test English for healthcare professions tend to specify an advanced C1 level of language, i.e. around 7 in IELTS and a B in OET.

The score equivalencies between the two tests are as follows:

IELTS	OET
8 - 9	A
7 - 7.5	B
5.5 - 6.5	C
4.5 - 5.5	D
4	E

### 5. Recognition

IELTS is recognised by universities, regulatory bodies, immigration authorities and companies in many countries around the world. This includes universities in non-English speaking countries where a course may be delivered in English. There are over 1,100 test centres in over 140 countries.

OET is recognised by healthcare regulatory bodies and Higher Education healthcare educators in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Dubai, and Namibia. There are over 80 test venues in 35 countries.



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## 6. Numbers of test takers

Over 3 million people took IELTS in the past year, compared to around 25,000 for the OET. This reflects the size and reach of the global Higher Education market on the one hand and the specialist nature of the OET on the other. Until now, the main market for OET has been those professionals wishing to work in Australia.

## 7. Preparation infrastructure

IELTS has a global infrastructure developed around preparing learners to take the test, including universities, private language schools, published materials, online content, and thousands of teachers and writers.

OET has a small, specialist preparation infrastructure, with a small number of providers and a minimal materials base.

### Want to know more about either test?

- *How do I know what my level is?*
- *How long does it take to achieve a 7 in IELTS or a B in OET?*
- *Which one is easier for me?*
- *What are the best study materials out there?*
- *Can you help me prepare for either test?*

### Then call us!

Specialist Language Courses (SLC) are experts in both IELTS and OET preparation. We work with 100s of candidates every year and specialise in working with healthcare professionals. Clients include many NHS Trusts and private healthcare groups in the UK.

Our Academic Director is an experienced IELTS trainer, examiner and teacher trainer. Our Head of Medical English is an experienced OET materials writer, trainer and teacher trainer.

### For more information

[What is IELTS?](#)

[What is the OET?](#)

[www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

[www.occupationalenglishtest.org](http://www.occupationalenglishtest.org)



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