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Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook

What each of the six official question types is trying to trip you up with, and the specific habit that beats it — question type by question type, section by section.

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Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook

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What this book is

The Band 7.0 Blueprint, also free on this site, already explains the core mechanic: Listening is scored out of 40, and 30 correct answers lands you on band 7. That is a hit rate, not a comprehension test, and its own Section 4 is built to be the hardest section on the paper. This book does not repeat that explanation. It picks up exactly where it stops.

What follows is technique, question type by question type, section by section, for the moment the audio actually starts. Every one of the six official question types shares one failure mode: the exact word or number you hear clearly is often not the answer, because the audio corrects, qualifies or supersedes it before the section moves on. This book names that trap once here, then shows its exact shape inside each question type and gives you a specific habit for it.

What this book is not

It is not a self-test. **The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0** already gives the official self-test and stopping rule for Listening — an official practice test under real timing, and a rule for knowing when a skill is done. This book does not invent a second, competing one. Part 8 sends you there by name once you have read the technique here and want to check whether it has worked.

It does not cover Reading, Writing or Speaking. Each of those gets its own dedicated book on this site in time. This book is Listening only.

The one promise this book makes

Getting band 7 in Listening is not about understanding every word. It is about knowing exactly what each question type is trying to trip you up with, and having a specific habit ready for the moment it happens. No technique here is claimed to guarantee a particular answer gets caught — each one is stated as what it does: it reduces a named failure mode. Only an official test result determines your actual band.

One thing to know before you start

Every passage, form, diagram and question in this book was invented for it. None of it is a transcription or a close copy of any real IELTS Listening item — the real test's audio is never reproduced, and nothing here should be mistaken for it. Practising with an invented example teaches the technique; only official practice materials tell you where you actually stand.

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Part 1 — The 30/40 rule, revisited — and the trap this book exists to fix



1.1 What 30/40 actually requires, in one page

The Band 7.0 Blueprint covers this in full in its own Part 2, so here is the short version, by name rather than re-derived: Listening is 40 questions, and 30 correct answers is band 7. That number is a hit rate, not a requirement to understand every word. The test is built assuming you will miss some.

Section 4 in particular is designed to be the hardest section on the paper — one speaker, an academic topic, no second voice to break it up. Even strong listeners lose answers there. Reaching band 7 is not about understanding every word of Section 4. It is about not letting three missed answers there cost you answers in Section 1, which is usually the easiest section and the one with the least excuse to lose marks on.

Each section plays once. There is no second listening. That single fact is why everything in this book — prediction, the correction-trap below, the

recovery drill in Part 6 — matters more in Listening than in any other skill: there is no going back to check.

1.2 The trap every question type shares

Here is the idea this whole book is organised around: **the exact word or number you hear clearly is often not the answer**, because the speaker corrects, qualifies or supersedes it before the audio moves on.

Take this invented example, the kind of moment every candidate hears in some form:

"Let's say the workshop starts at three... actually, we've had to push it back — make it half past three, so people coming from the city campus have time to get across."

A candidate who writes down "three" the instant they hear it has heard every word correctly and still lost the mark. The answer that survives to the end of the sentence is half past three, not the first number spoken. This is not a trick specific to times — the same shape appears with names, prices, dates, room numbers, anything a speaker might reconsider mid-sentence.

This is a fact about how the test is built, not a claim about how often it happens. Nothing in this book states a percentage of questions built this way, because no such figure has been published and inventing one would not help you. What you can rely on is the habit: **listen to the end of an idea, not to its first mention**. Each of the six question-type sections in Part 4 shows this trap in that type's own specific shape, because a correction inside a multiple-choice question looks different from a

correction inside a form-completion answer, even though the underlying mechanism is the same.

Part 2 — What's changing in 2026 — Listening's own version

The Band 7.0 Blueprint's own Part 1 already covers the delivery-mode changes in full: the paper test retiring worldwide from mid-2026, Writing on Paper as an exception in some markets, the UKVI version being computer-only already, and One Skill Retake. This book does not repeat any of that. One consequence, though, is specific to Listening and changes how two of this book's own parts should be practised, so it earns its own short part here rather than a pointer alone.

2.1 Typed as you go, not transferred afterward

On computer-delivered Listening, there is no separate answer sheet. You type your answers directly into the on-screen answer form as each section's audio plays, using headphones provided at the test centre. Since virtually every candidate now sits the test this way, this book assumes it from here on and says so plainly, rather than silently switching between "write" and "type" without explaining why.

2.2 Two minutes, not ten — why that raises the stakes

The old paper-based test gave 10 minutes at the end of the Listening section to transfer answers from the question paper onto a separate answer sheet. That 10 minutes doubled as a safety net: a blank answer, or a doubtful spelling, could be reconsidered at leisure once the audio had finished.

Computer-delivered Listening gives you 2 minutes at the end of the whole test to check what you typed. Two minutes is not enough time to

reconsider more than a handful of answers across all four sections. That is the direct reason two later parts of this book matter more now than they did on paper:

- **Part 5's spelling discipline** — get the spelling right while you type, not "at the end," because there may not be time left to fix it.
- **Part 6's recovery drill** — type a guess immediately when you miss an answer, and never leave a blank, because a blank left during the audio has almost no chance of being filled in during the 2-minute window.

Neither of those parts is new advice invented for this change. Both are habits this book would recommend anyway. What changed is how much they cost you if you skip them.

Part 3 — Before the audio starts: the thirty seconds that decide the section



3.1 Reading ahead: what the preview window is actually for

Before each section's audio starts, you get a short gap to look at that section's questions. That gap is not dead time. It is the only chance you get to read the questions before you need the answers, and everything in 3.2 below depends on using it.

A candidate who spends the preview window doing nothing — or worse, still finishing the previous section's questions — starts the new audio blind, hearing information before knowing what it is being asked to supply. A candidate who reads ahead knows, before a single word of audio plays, what kind of answer each gap is waiting for.

3.2 Predicting the shape of the missing answer before you hear it

Reading a question tells you more than what it is asking. It tells you the *shape* of the answer, before you have heard a word of audio.

Form and note completion. A gap next to "Contact number: ____" is waiting for a number, not a name. A gap next to "Delivery date: ____" is waiting for a date. Read the words either side of every gap before the audio starts, and you already know whether you are listening for a number, a name, a single word, or a short phrase — narrowing what you listen *for*, not just listening in general.

Multiple choice. Read all three options before the audio starts. You are not listening to find the right answer from nothing — you are listening to work out which of three named things the speaker is actually describing, and options often sound similar on purpose.

Sentence completion. The sentence around the gap already constrains what can go there grammatically. "The workshop will be held in the ____" is waiting for a place, most likely a noun. "A minimum of ____ participants is required" is waiting for a number. Predicting the *type* of word needed, before listening for its content, is covered in full in Part 4.5 — the point here is that the prediction step happens in the preview window, before the audio starts, not during it.

3.3 Marking your guess and moving on

The Band 7.0 Blueprint names the underlying habit once: mark a guess and move on. Here is the concrete version. The instant you realise you have lost an answer, type your best guess — never leave it blank —

and immediately move your attention to the next question. Do not spend even a second replaying what you might have missed.

This matters more under computer delivery than it used to on paper, for the reason Part 2.2 already gave: the 2-minute check window at the end is not enough time to go back and fill in something left blank during the audio. Part 6 gives this habit its full, practisable treatment.

Part 4 — The six question types, one playbook each

The test is built from six official question types. The same type can appear in any of the four sections, and a candidate who only thinks in terms of "Section 3 is hard" never isolates which specific *type* is actually costing them marks. Each section below follows the same shape: what it asks, its own version of the correction-trap from Part 1.2, the technique, and a short original worked example. Every example below was written for this book — none of it is a real test item.

4.1 Multiple choice

What it asks. You choose one correct option from a short list, usually three, based on what the speaker says.

The trap. Distractor options are often things the speaker mentions and then rules out.

"We thought about running the tour on Tuesday, but that clashes with the staff meeting, so it's Thursday now instead."

A candidate listening for "Tuesday" because it was the first day mentioned picks the wrong option. The speaker named it only to rule it out.

The technique. Treat each option as a hypothesis to test, not a word to match. As the audio plays, mentally cross off any option the speaker rules out, rather than locking onto the first option you hear mentioned. The

correct option is often the one that survives elimination, not the one spoken first.

4.2 Matching

What it asks. You match a list of items (people, places, dates) to a list of options, where each option is normally used once.

The trap. Because each option is used only once, an early wrong match uses up an option a later, easier question actually needed. One mistake at question one can cost you the answer at question four as well, even though question four was never itself confusing.

The technique. Mark tentative matches lightly — a light pencil mark or a soft guess, not a permanent commitment — as you go, and only confirm the full set once you have heard all the information for that group of questions. If you are not sure between two speakers early on, hold both possibilities open rather than fixing one and moving on, and resolve the ambiguity once you have heard everyone.

4.3 Plan, map and diagram labelling

What it asks. You label points on a plan, map or diagram based on spoken directions.

The trap. Spoken directions describe position relative to other things — "past the library, on the left" — and losing your place on the diagram for even one direction means every label that follows is also lost, because each new direction builds on the last one.

The technique. Keep a finger, pen or on-screen pointer moving on the diagram in real time as the directions are spoken, tracking the route

continuously rather than listening only for place names and trying to work out positions afterward. If you lose your place, find the last point you were sure of and pick the route back up from there rather than guessing forward.

Worked example (invented, for illustration only): a spoken description might run, "Enter through the main gate, and the reception desk is the first building on your right. Carry on past it, and the car park is on your left, just before the sports hall." A candidate tracking the route in real time places reception first, correctly locates the car park between reception and the sports hall, and never has to guess.

4.4 Form, note, table, flow-chart and summary completion

What it asks. You fill gaps in a form, set of notes, table, flow-chart or summary, usually under a stated word limit such as "no more than two words."

The trap. The word limit is a hard rule, not a guideline. A technically correct answer that uses one word more than allowed scores zero, regardless of whether every word in it was heard correctly.

The technique. Count words before you write, every time, and know the shape of the specific completion sub-type you are looking at: a flow-chart's gaps are usually sequential steps in a process, so each answer should fit logically after the one before it; a table's gaps are usually one category of information at a time (all dates in one column, all names in another), which narrows what kind of word each gap needs before you hear it.

4.5 Sentence completion

What it asks. You complete a sentence with a word or short phrase from the audio, again under a word-limit rule.

The trap. The sentence's own grammar already constrains what can go in the gap — singular or plural, a noun or a number, a place or a person — and an answer that is factually close but grammatically wrong for the gap is still marked wrong.

The technique. Read the sentence around the gap first, before the audio for that question plays, and predict the *type* of word needed — is the gap asking for one thing or several, a specific number, a proper name — before you listen for its actual content. This is the same prediction step from Part 3.2, applied specifically to sentence completion's grammar.

4.6 Short-answer questions

What it asks. You answer a direct question in a short form, again under a word-limit rule.

The trap. Short-answer questions are the type most often answered in more words than the audio actually used, because a candidate paraphrases the answer in their own words instead of writing down the words the speaker actually said.

The technique. Answer using the words the audio used, not a paraphrase of them — if the speaker says "next Wednesday," write "next Wednesday," not a reworded version of it — and check the word limit before moving to the next question, the same discipline as Part 4.4.

Part 5 — Spelling, word limits and the free marks candidates give away

5.1 Spelling and capitalisation

Both British and American spellings are accepted, as long as the word is spelled correctly in either variety. Capitalisation is not scored. But a name spelled wrong is marked wrong, even if you heard it correctly — the mark is lost at the transcription step, not the listening step. That distinction matters for where you actually practise: if you keep losing marks on names or unusual words, the fix is spelling drills, not more listening practice.

Get it right while you type. Part 2.2 already explained why: the 2-minute check window at the end of a computer-delivered test is not enough time to reconsider more than a handful of spellings across the whole test. Treat spelling as a typing-time discipline, something you get right the first time, not an end-of-test one you plan to fix later.

5.2 Numbers, dates and the word-limit rule

Numbers may be written as either digits or words unless a question specifically says otherwise — "7" and "seven" are both accepted where no rule states one form. A word-limit rule such as "no more than two words" applies to numerals and hyphenated compounds in ways worth stating plainly, since these are marks lost to a rule, not to mishearing anything:

- A number written as digits, such as "42," normally counts as one word for the purposes of a word limit, not as two.

- A hyphenated compound such as "twenty-two" is typically treated as one word when hyphenated.
- Dates should follow the format the question or the audio actually uses — if the audio gives a specific format, use that one rather than converting it to a different style.

None of these are guessed rules. They follow directly from how the test's own word-limit instruction is written and applied, and the safest approach when a specific case feels uncertain is to write the answer exactly as the audio stated it, in the simplest form that fits the stated limit.

Part 6 — Missed one — now what: the recovery drill



6.1 Why one missed answer becomes three

The Band 7.0 Blueprint names this pattern once: the audio does not wait, and a listener who mentally chases a missed answer loses the next one too. Here is the specific mechanism behind it. The audio has already moved on to the next question while you are still thinking about the one you missed. Attention spent re-running a question you have already lost is attention not spent reading the *next* question during its own preview moment — so the loss compounds forward, one missed answer turning into two or three rather than staying just one.

6.2 The two-second drill

Here is the concrete, practisable version. The instant you realise an answer is gone: type your best guess — never leave the space blank — and in the same motion, move your eyes to the next question on the screen.

Two seconds, no more. This is not advice to "stay calm." It is a physical drill, meant to be rehearsed in practice tests specifically until it happens automatically, the same way you would rehearse any other timed skill.

This drill is non-negotiable under computer delivery, for the reason Part 2.2 already gave in full: the old paper-test safety net — a leisurely 10-minute transfer time at the end, during which a skipped question could be reconsidered — no longer exists. A blank left during the audio stays blank unless the 2-minute check at the very end happens to reach it, and two minutes across the whole test rarely reaches more than a handful of answers. A guessed answer has a chance of being right. A blank never does.

Part 7 — One section, start to finish

Everything in this part is original, written for this book. It is built in the style of a Section 2-style monologue — one speaker, a practical topic — to show how the previous parts work together, from the preview window through to the audio itself. It is not a real test item and should not be treated as one.

7.1 Preview

Before the audio below plays, a candidate would see questions shaped like this:

1. What time does the community garden open on weekdays? _____
2. Visitors must sign in at the _____ desk.
3. The workshop on Saturday is about A. planting vegetables B. composting C. pruning fruit trees
4. How much does a locker cost per month? £ _____

Applying the prediction technique from Part 3.2: Question 1 is waiting for a time. Question 2 is waiting for a single word or short phrase naming a place within the site. Question 3 is multiple choice, so all three topics should be held in mind at once rather than committed to early. Question 4 is waiting for a number, likely with a currency symbol already given.

7.2 Transcript and answers

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Elmridge Community Garden. I'll run through a few practical details before we start the tour.

We're open every weekday from eight — actually, hold on, we changed that last month — it's half past eight now on weekdays, to give the early volunteers time to open up the tool shed first.

[Answer 1: half past eight]

When you arrive, please sign in. There's a sign-in sheet at the entrance, but we'd actually rather you use the one at the greenhouse desk — that way whoever's on duty there can point you to whatever plot needs help that day. *[Answer 2: greenhouse]*

This Saturday we've got a workshop running. We were going to do a session on composting, since a few people asked about it, but we've had so much interest in the fruit trees this year that we've switched the topic — Saturday's workshop is now about pruning fruit trees instead. Composting will come back another month.

[Answer 3: C]

Last thing — lockers. If you'd like one for your tools, they're available to rent. It used to be four pounds a month, but with the new locks we installed, it's gone up slightly, to five pounds a month now. *[Answer 4: 5]*

7.3 Why the wrong options were designed to be chosen

Question 1 rewards listening to the end. A candidate who writes "eight" the moment they hear it has stopped listening exactly where the correction arrives.

Question 3 is a direct application of the multiple-choice technique from Part 4.1. Composting is mentioned first and would tempt a candidate who locks onto the first topic named. The speaker explicitly rules it out ("we were going to... but") before naming the actual answer, pruning fruit trees — the same "options ruled out mid-sentence" pattern Part 4.1's technique is built to catch.

Question 4 shows the correction-trap in its numeric form: four pounds is stated first, as the old price, before the sentence corrects to the current price of five. A candidate who stops listening at the first number gives away a mark on a question that required nothing more than listening to the end of the sentence.

Part 8 — Checking your own progress

8.1 This book is technique, not a test

Everything above is technique: how to read a preview window, how to catch a correction, what to do in the two seconds after a missed answer. None of it tells you whether you have actually reached band 7 in Listening. That question has an answer already, and it is not this book's job to invent a second way of finding it.

The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0 gives the self-test for exactly this: an official practice test, sat under real timing, with a two-consecutive-attempts stopping rule for knowing whether a skill is genuinely done. If you have read this book and want to know whether the techniques in it are working, that is where to go next — not to a second, competing self-assessment invented here.

The end

You started this book able to hear the audio. You finish it with a specific habit for every one of the six question types the test is built from, and a drill for the two seconds after you miss one.

That is the whole of it: read ahead, predict the shape of the answer, listen to the end of an idea rather than its first mention, and never leave a blank. None of it requires understanding every word of Section 4. It requires not losing marks you were never actually going to lose to comprehension.

About the worked examples. Every passage, form and question in this book was written for it. None of it is official IELTS content, and practising with it is not the same as sitting the real test. Use official practice materials for your actual self-assessment — see **The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0**.

About the 2026 changes. The computer-delivery details in Part 2 were checked against ielts.org and British Council material shortly before publication. Delivery details are exactly the kind of thing that gets adjusted over time. Confirm current rules with ielts.org and with your own test centre before you rely on them.

Good luck with the test, and with whatever it is a step toward.

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