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Speaking 7.0: What "Fluent Enough" Actually Sounds Like

Band 7 still pauses, still searches for words, still corrects itself. Marked-up transcripts show exactly where the line between 6 and 7 sits, criterion by criterion.

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What this book is

Ask a band-6.5 speaker what band 7 sounds like and most will describe something close to perfect: no pauses, no mistakes, quick, smooth, maybe a native-sounding accent. Band 7 does not sound like that. It still pauses. It still searches for a word now and then, still corrects itself, still makes the odd basic mistake. What it does not do is lose the listener.

This book is about that line. Not what goes wrong in Speaking — other books on this site already cover that — but exactly where "fluent enough" sits, shown as short transcripts of real-sounding speech, pauses and all. Each pair shows the same moment twice: once in a way that plausibly earns 6, once in a way that plausibly earns 7. Both versions pause. The difference is what happens next.

What this book is not

It is not a Speaking course, and it does not repeat the three books that already cover Speaking on this site. *The Band 7.0 Blueprint* explains the four criteria and the three parts in plain terms. *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3* gives model answers for every part, and six habits that keep people at band 6. *The 9 Wrong Speaking Habits* names nine more, from the examiner's side. Those books are about mistakes. This one is about

the line, and it points to them where a mistake belongs there rather than here.

It does not cover Listening, Reading or Writing. Each has its own book on this site: *Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook*, *Reading 7.0: The 30/40 Question-Type Priority Map* and *Writing 7.0: The Four Criteria, Decoded Sentence by Sentence*. This book is Speaking only.

The one promise this book makes

Band 7 Speaking is not polished English. This book shows you, transcript by transcript, where the line between 6 and 7 actually sits, so you can stop chasing perfection and work on the one thing that is holding the band. No move in this book is claimed to guarantee a band. The four criteria are judged by a trained examiner across the whole test, and only an official result tells you where you stand.

One thing to know before you start

Every question and every transcript in this book was written for it. None of it is a real IELTS Speaking question, cue card or examiner comment, and none of it is a close copy of one. The band descriptors this book explains are published on ielts.org; they are explained here in plain language, not reproduced.

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Part 1 — "Fluent enough" is a line, not a feeling



1.1 The four criteria, past the summary

Speaking is marked on four criteria: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy, and Pronunciation. *The Band 7.0 Blueprint*, Part 5, explains each one in plain terms, so this book does not repeat that. Three facts about how the criteria are used matter more here than what they are called.

They carry equal weight. The examiner gives a band for each of the four, and your Speaking band is worked out from the average, as ielts.org explains its scoring. Fluency is not worth more than grammar. Pronunciation is not worth more than vocabulary.

They are judged across the whole test. The notes that come with the band descriptors say the band reflects how you did across all three parts together. It is not your best answer, and it is not your worst one.

One poor Part 1 answer does not set your band. A habit that shows up in every part does.

A band has to be met in full. The same notes say a speaker has to show all the positive features of a band to be given it. "Mostly sounds like a 7" in one criterion is a 6 in that criterion.

One thing follows from the arithmetic alone. If one criterion sits at 6 and two sit at 7, the fourth has to reach 8 for the four to average 7. That is a hard way to get there. It is usually more realistic to find the criterion that is holding you at 6 and move it up one band. To do that, you need to know exactly where the line between 6 and 7 sits in each criterion. That is what this book is for.

1.2 What band 7 still allows

Read the band 7 descriptors on ielts.org and you will find a list of things many 6.5 speakers are trying hard to get rid of. In plain words, a band 7 speaker can still:

- pause to look for a word, even in the middle of a sentence;
- repeat a word while thinking;
- correct themselves;
- make a few basic grammar mistakes;
- now and then use a word that does not quite fit;
- have an accent.

None of that is a band 7 failure. The Fluency and Coherence descriptor at band 7 says that hesitation, repetition and self-correction can still happen, often in the middle of a sentence, while the speaker is looking for

the right language. What it adds is that they do not damage coherence: the listener can still follow. At band 6, the same descriptor says coherence may be lost at times because of them.

That is the whole difference, and it is narrow. It is not whether you pause. It is what the pause costs the listener. So this book uses one test for every pause and every correction, all the way through:

The test: *did the sentence finish, and does it still mean what it set out to mean?*

If the answer is yes, the pause cost you nothing. If the sentence was dropped, or turned into a different sentence halfway through, the listener lost the thread for a moment. That is the band 6 description, however short the pause was.

Band 8 goes one step further. There, most pauses are about *what* to say next, not about finding the words to say it. You do not need that for a 7.

1.3 How to read the transcripts

Speech written on a page usually looks cleaner than it sounded. The transcripts in this book do the opposite: they put the pauses and corrections back in, so you can see them.

- ... is a short pause.
- **[pause]** is a long pause, the kind a listener notices.
- — is where the speaker breaks off, then fixes a word or starts again.
- Fillers like *um* and *er* are written as they were said.

Each pair shows the same moment twice. **At band 6** is a plausible version that sits on the wrong side of the line. **At band 7** is a plausible

version that sits on the right side. Both of them pause. Read each one aloud, at a normal speed, before you read the notes under it.

Every transcript was written for this book. They show where the line sits. They are not scored samples, and no examiner has marked them.

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



The Band 7.0 Blueprint covers the change itself: the paper-based test is being withdrawn from mid-2026, on a timeline that varies by market. This book does not repeat that. This part covers only what the change means for Speaking, which is less than you might expect.

2.1 The one skill the change leaves alone

Listening, Reading and Writing are changing how you give your answers. Speaking is not. It was never a paper test. It is still a recorded conversation with a trained examiner, 11 to 14 minutes long, in three parts. It takes place face to face or by video call, and for IELTS Online it is by video call. It may be on the same day as the other three skills, or up to a week before or after them.

Nothing in this book depends on how you take the test. The line between 6 and 7 sits in the same place in a room and on a screen.

2.2 One Skill Retake, from Speaking's side

The change does touch one Speaking decision. One Skill Retake lets you take a single skill again, Speaking included, without sitting the whole test. When this book was checked against ielts.org, the main conditions were these:

- you have to take it within 60 days of your original test;
- you can use it once for each original test;
- the original has to be a full IELTS on computer test, at a centre that offers the retake, so as paper is withdrawn, more candidates meet this condition;
- not every organisation accepts a retake result, so check with the one you are applying to first;
- you get a new Test Report Form with your retake score and your other three original scores, and you choose which report to send.

The point for this book is simple. A Speaking retake is a second recording of the same speaker. If whatever held your band at 6 has not changed, the second recording will most likely show it again. A retake is worth booking when you can name what you have fixed. The rest of this book is about finding it.

Part 3 — Fluency and Coherence: where the line sits

Fluency and Coherence is where most 6.5 speakers aim in the wrong direction. They hear "fluency" and think "no pauses, and faster". The band 7 descriptor asks for something else: long answers that come without obvious effort, and a listener who can always follow. This part shows five places where the line between 6 and 7 sits. Each one has a pair of transcripts and one move.

3.1 The pause that costs nothing

A pause to find a word is allowed at band 7, even in the middle of a sentence. What matters is the next second. Either the word arrives and the sentence carries on, or the sentence is dropped and something else starts.

Part 1 question: How do you usually get to work or to class?

At band 6: "I usually take the bus, because it's, um ... [pause] Yes, the bus is good. Sometimes I walk."

At band 7: "I usually take the bus, because it's ... it's cheaper than the train, and it stops right outside my building, so it's hard to beat, really."

Both speakers paused at the same point, while looking for the reason. In the first answer, the reason never came. The speaker covered the gap with a safe sentence and moved on, and the listener is still waiting for "because it's" to finish. In the second answer, the pause is longer than the speaker would like. There is even a repeated "it's" while they think. But

the sentence finishes, and it means what it set out to mean. That pause cost nothing.

The move. When you pause in the middle of a sentence, finish the sentence you started, even with a plainer word than the one you wanted. "Because it's cheaper" is a complete reason. A dropped "because it's ..." is not. If filler is replacing your thinking rather than covering it, that is a different problem, and *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*, section 4.3, deals with it.

3.2 The repair and the restart

Correcting yourself is allowed at band 7. Self-correction is on the descriptor's list of things that can still happen. But there are two kinds. A repair fixes a word and carries on with the same sentence. A restart drops the sentence and begins a different one. The first keeps the listener with you. The second makes them start again too.

Part 3 question: Why do some people prefer small local shops to big supermarkets?

At band 6: "Because in small shops the people are more ... they know you. No — I mean, big supermarkets are cheaper, of course, but some people don't like them. They are too big and, um, too crowded."

At band 7: "Mostly because the staff know you. Well — not know you, exactly, but they recognise you, and they remember what you bought last time. You don't get that in a big supermarket, even if it's cheaper."

Both speakers corrected themselves once. In the second answer, "know you" became "recognise you", and the answer carried on with the same idea. The correction even made it more precise. In the first answer, "No — I mean" did not fix a word. It swapped the answer for a different one,

about supermarket prices, and the listener now has to work out which point the speaker is making.

The move. When you correct yourself, change the word, not the sentence. Say the better word, then carry on from where you were. If you find yourself correcting nearly every sentence, look at the over-correction spiral in *The 9 Wrong Speaking Habits*, section 2.4.

3.3 Long turns that add, and long turns that circle

The band 6 and band 7 descriptors both describe a speaker who keeps going and gives long answers. So length is not the difference. Many 6.5 speakers have learned "always extend your answer", and they do. But they extend it by saying the same thing again in other words. A band 7 answer gets longer by adding something: a reason, an example, a contrast, a result.

Part 1 question: Do you like living in a big city?

At band 6: "Yes, I like it very much. I think living in a big city is very good, because there are a lot of things to do. In the city there is always something to do, so you never get bored. That's why I like living in the city."

At band 7: "Mostly, yes. There's always something going on, so I'm never bored. The downside is the rent ... it's ridiculous. I'm paying nearly half my salary for quite a small flat. So I like it, but I'm not sure I'll stay forever."

The two answers are about the same length. The first has one idea, that there are things to do, said four times. The second has three: there is plenty to do, the rent is a problem, and so the speaker may not stay. Each

sentence moves the answer on. The second one also pauses ("the rent ..."), and it is still the stronger answer.

The move. Before each new sentence in a long answer, ask yourself: does this add something, or say it again? If it says it again, add a reason, an example or a "but" instead. The extending habit itself is in *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*, section 0.3. This section is only the check that the extra sentences add something.

3.4 Spoken markers, not written connectors

The band 7 descriptor asks for flexible use of *spoken* discourse markers and connecting words. The word "spoken" matters. Many 6.5 speakers carry their Writing connectors into Speaking: firstly, secondly, in addition, to sum up. Said aloud, they sound like an essay being read out. They are not wrong. They are the wrong kind of English for a conversation, and they mostly start points rather than connect them.

Part 3 question: Is it better to learn a new skill from a teacher or from videos online?

At band 6: "Firstly, a teacher can correct your mistakes. Secondly, the videos are free, so they are cheaper. In addition, you can watch videos any time. To sum up, both have advantages and disadvantages."

At band 7: "It depends on the skill, really. With something like a language, a teacher's better, because they'll actually notice your mistakes. But for something practical, like fixing a bike, I mean, a video's fine. You can pause it, watch the tricky part again ... that kind of thing."

The first answer is well organised, and that is its problem: it is organised like an essay. "Firstly", "Secondly", "In addition" and "To sum up" each

start a new point, but none of them links two points together, and the last line takes no position at all. The second answer uses the small words speech actually uses, such as "really", "I mean" and "that kind of thing". Its connecting words also do a job. "Because" gives a reason. "But" sets up the contrast the whole answer is built on.

The move. Leave the essay connectors in your Writing. In speech, the useful markers are small: *well, actually, I mean, the thing is, that said*, so. Use them where your thinking turns, at a contrast, a correction or a reason, not at the start of every sentence.

3.5 Speed is not the target

Fast speech feels fluent to the person speaking. It is not what the descriptors reward. The band 6 Pronunciation descriptor names a fast speaking rate as one of the things that can upset a speaker's rhythm. The band 7 Fluency and Coherence descriptor asks for long answers that come without obvious effort. Fluency at 7 means no strain. It does not mean a high number of words per minute.

Part 1 question: What kind of music do you like?

At band 6: "I like many kinds of music, pop music, rock music, also some classical music, I listen when I study and when I go to the gym and in the car and — [pause] yes, many kinds."

At band 7: "Mostly pop, if I'm honest. I listen to it at the gym ... and in the car. Not much classical, though. I tried it for studying once, and it just sent me to sleep."

Read the first answer aloud quickly, the way a nervous speaker might say it. There are no short pauses at all, because the speaker will not let

themselves stop. Then there is one long pause, where the sentence runs out and goes nowhere. The second answer pauses once, briefly, in a place where a pause makes sense, and every sentence lands. It is slower, and it sounds more fluent.

The move. Speak at the speed at which you can finish your sentences. If you tend to rush, try this in practice: take a short breath at each full stop. It will feel slow to you. To a listener, it usually sounds calm. Rushing also tends to get worse late in a long answer, which is where 4.3 picks it up.

Part 4 — The other three criteria, at "enough"

Fluency is where most 6.5 speakers aim too high. The other three criteria have the same problem in different forms: rare words instead of the right ones, perfect grammar instead of working grammar, a "native" accent instead of being easy to understand. Each section below shows what "enough" looks like at band 7.

4.1 Lexical Resource: talking round a missing word

At band 7, vocabulary is used flexibly across different topics. There are some less common words and phrases, and the speaker shows a feel for which words go together, though the descriptor expects some of it to miss. The band 7 speaker also uses paraphrase well when they need to. ielts.org's own explanation of this criterion includes using other words when you do not know a particular one. That is a skill being marked, not a weakness to hide.

Part 2, talking about a trip to the mountains:

At band 6: "We went up on the, um ... the ... [pause] Sorry, I don't know the word. We went up and the view was very beautiful."

At band 7: "We went up in one of those ... you know, the little cars that hang from a cable and go up the side of the mountain. And the view from the top was incredible."

Both speakers lost the same word: *cable car*. The first stopped, apologised and dropped the detail. The second described the thing instead, "the little cars that hang from a cable", and the listener still sees

the picture. Notice that the description is not elegant. It does not need to be.

Less common is not rare. The band 7 descriptor mentions some less common and idiomatic language. Many 6.5 speakers read that as "learn idioms". But an idiom from a list that does not quite fit sounds less natural, not more.

Part 1 question: Tell me about your hometown.

At band 6: "My hometown is very small, and everyone knows each other, so it's a piece of cake to make friends there, and it's raining cats and dogs all winter."

At band 7: "My hometown's tiny. Everyone knows everyone, which is lovely, until you want to keep something private. And it rains pretty much non-stop all winter."

The first answer uses two idioms that every textbook teaches, and both sound stuck on. "Raining cats and dogs" describes one heavy shower, not a whole season. The second answer has no textbook idioms at all. It has phrases people actually say, such as "everyone knows everyone" and "pretty much non-stop", and every one of them fits.

The move. When a word will not come, describe it — what it does, what it looks like, what it is like — and keep going. When you want a less common word, choose a natural phrase that fits exactly, not an idiom from a list. *The 9 Wrong Speaking Habits*, sections 2.1 and 2.2, deals with translating in your head and retreating to safe words.

4.2 Grammatical Range and Accuracy: a few basic errors still sit at 7

The band 7 descriptor says it directly: a few basic errors can still be there. What it asks for at 7 is a range of structures used flexibly, with plenty of sentences that have no errors at all. At band 6, the speaker mixes short and complex sentences, but the complex ones often contain errors, even though the listener can usually still understand.

So the line is not "no mistakes". It is complex sentences that mostly hold. In speech, three complex structures come up again and again:

- a relative clause, to describe something: *the café that opened near my office*;
- a conditional, to imagine or guess: *if they had built it ten years ago, ...*;
- a then-and-now contrast, to talk about change: *we used to ..., but now*

Part 3 question: How has the way people travel changed in your country?

At band 6: "Before, people travel by train mostly, but now everybody have a car. It is a problem, the traffic, which it is very bad in the cities. If the government will build more trains, people use it more, I think."

At band 7: "Well, my grandparents' generation used to go everywhere by train, but now almost every family has a car. The trouble is the traffic, which is terrible in the bigger cities. If the government had put more money into the railways earlier, I think a lot of people would still be using them. But I don't think it'll happen now. Nobody want to pay for it."

Both answers try the same three structures. In the first, all three slip. The "then" half of the contrast is in the present tense. The relative clause has an extra "it". The conditional puts "will" in the wrong half and calls the trains "it". The meaning still gets through, and that is exactly what band 6 describes. In the second, all three structures hold: "used to ... but now", "which is terrible", and "If the government had put ... would still be using". There is still a basic error at the very end: "Nobody want" should be "Nobody wants". One basic slip, in an answer whose complex sentences hold, is what band 7 looks like.

The move. Do not cut out complex sentences to stay safe, because that loses range. Practise the three structures until they hold, and stop worrying about the odd basic slip. For keeping tense right across a whole answer, see *The 9 Wrong Speaking Habits*, section 2.3.

4.3 Pronunciation: understood without effort

Pronunciation at band 7 is defined by the bands on either side of it: everything that is positive at band 6, plus some, but not all, of what band 8 has. A band 6 speaker can generally be understood all the way through without much effort. They use stress and intonation well at times, but they do not keep it up, and a lack of rhythm or a fast speaking rate can affect them. A band 8 speaker keeps a suitable rhythm going, is easy to understand, and has an accent that makes very little difference.

Accent is not the target. Notice what none of these bands ask for: a native accent. Even the band 9 descriptor only says that your accent should make no difference to how easily you are understood. Time spent trying to sound American or British is time not spent on what is marked.

Keeping it up is the target. A book cannot hear you, and this section does not pretend to. But the gap between 6 and 7 in Pronunciation is mostly about *keeping it up*. Most band 6 speakers already group their words well, most of the time, and the band 6 descriptor says so. What slips is keeping that going through a long answer.

One part of it you can see on paper is where the pauses fall. Pausing between word groups helps the listener. Pausing inside them makes the listener work harder. Here is one sentence, split two ways:

Grouped: the most important thing / for young people / is finding a job / they really enjoy

Broken: the most / important thing for / young people is / finding a

Most speakers sound like the first line at the start of an answer. The second line tends to appear late in a long answer, when the speaker is tired and starting to rush (3.5).

The move. Record a full Part 2 long turn. Listen to the first thirty seconds, then the last thirty. If the pauses in the last thirty seconds have moved inside the word groups, or the speed has gone up, that is the part to work on: slow down and finish the long turn the way you started it. For stress on the words that matter, see the flat-delivery habit in *The 9 Wrong Speaking Habits*, section 2.5.

Part 5 — One answer, decoded



Parts 3 and 4 each showed one part of the line on its own. A real answer has to hold all of it at once. This part takes one Part 3 question and shows the same speaker's answer twice: once at a plausible 6.5, once at a plausible 7. The argument is the same in both. Read each one aloud before you read what changed.

5.1 The question

Do you think people today are less patient than people were in the past?

5.2 The answer, at 6.5

At band 6: "Yes, I think, um, people are less patient nowadays. Firstly, because of technology. Everything is very fast, like ... if a video doesn't load in, er, two seconds, people just close it. In addition, in the past people were more patient, because they don't have this technology, so they had to wait for many things, for example letters. And I think the young people especially, they are more ... [pause] Young people are less

patient than old people. My little brother, he can't wait for anything, he wants everything at the moment. So yes, I think people are less patient because the technology is very fast and, um, people get used to it, so they are less patient."

This is not a weak answer. It answers the question, gives a reason, and gives two examples. Most of it is clear. That is exactly why it is a useful 6.5: nothing in it is badly wrong, and it still sits on the wrong side of the line in each of the four criteria.

5.3 The same answer, at 7

At band 7: "Yes, I think so, at least in some ways. The thing is, we've got used to things happening instantly. If a video takes more than a couple of seconds to load, most people just ... give up and scroll on. My grandparents used to wait weeks for a letter — well, for a reply to a letter, and that was completely normal for them. So I suppose what's changed is what we expect, not ... not people themselves. Actually, my little brother is a good example. He'll spend a whole afternoon building something out of Lego, really carefully, but if his game don't start straight away, he's furious. So I'd say we haven't become less patient as people. We've become less patient with machines, which is a slightly different thing."

This is not polished either. It pauses while looking for a word ("just ... give up"). It repeats a word while thinking ("not ... not people"). It corrects itself once ("a letter — well, for a reply to a letter"). And it has a basic grammar mistake near the end. All four of those are things band 7 still allows.

5.4 What changed, criterion by criterion

Fluency and Coherence (Part 3). Both answers pause. The difference is what happens next. In the 6.5 answer, "they are more ... [pause]" is dropped, and a different sentence starts: the restart from 3.2. In the 7 answer, every pause ends with the sentence finishing as planned, and the one correction fixes a phrase and carries on. The 6.5 answer also uses essay connectors ("Firstly", "In addition"), the pattern from 3.4, and its last sentence says the first sentence again, the circling from 3.3. The 7 answer ends with something new: the idea the whole answer was building toward, that we are less patient with machines, not with each other.

Lexical Resource (4.1). "He wants everything at the moment" is clear, but "at the moment" means "now", not "without waiting". That is the kind of slip band 6 allows: the meaning still gets through. The 7 answer's words are not rare. "Give up", "scroll on", "straight away", "furious", "a slightly different thing" are all everyday English, and each one fits exactly. That is what "less common" means at 7: not difficult words, but words chosen precisely.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy (4.2). The 6.5 answer's main error sits inside its only then-and-now contrast: "in the past people were more patient, because they don't have this technology". The tense slips in the one complex structure the answer tries. The 7 answer has an error too: "if his game don't start" should be "doesn't". But it is a basic slip, and around it the complex structures hold: the conditional ("If a video takes ... most people just give up"), the then-and-now contrast ("used to wait weeks ... what's changed is what we expect"), and the relative clause ("which is a slightly different thing"). A few basic errors with working complex sentences is the band 7 picture.

Pronunciation (4.3). A transcript cannot show this one, and this book does not pretend it can. What it can show is where the pauses fall. In the 7 answer they sit at the edges of phrases or before a word the speaker is looking for. Read both answers aloud at a calm speed and you will hear the difference in rhythm that the page only hints at.

5.5 The test, applied

Go back to the test from 1.2 — *did the sentence finish, and does it still mean what it set out to mean?* — and apply it to every pause and correction in the two answers.

In the 7 answer, every one passes. In the 6.5 answer, one fails outright ("they are more ... [pause]" never finishes), and the answer as a whole drifts: it ends where it started. Everything else between the two versions — the connectors, the word choices, the grammar — comes from the sections in Parts 3 and 4. But the test is the one thing you can apply to your own speech straight away, and Part 6 shows you how.

Part 6 — Hearing the line in your own recording

This book cannot hear you. What it can give you is a way to check the one thing it has been about, whether your pauses and corrections cost the listener the thread, using a recording of your own voice.

6.1 Write out thirty seconds

1. Record yourself answering one Part 3 question you have not prepared. Speak for at least a minute. The practice prompts in *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*, Part 5, work well, or you can make one up.
2. Choose thirty seconds from the middle of the answer, not the start. The start is the part you control best.
3. Write it out exactly as you said it, in this book's notation: ... for a short pause, **[pause]** for a long one, — where you broke off, and every *um* and *er*. Do not tidy it up.

Writing out thirty seconds of speech takes longer than you expect. That is the point. On paper, you can see what your ear lets pass.

6.2 Check each pause and correction

Go through your transcript and mark every ..., **[pause]** and —. For each one, ask the test from 1.2: *did the sentence finish, and does it still mean what it set out to mean?*

- **Yes.** Leave it alone. That pause is allowed at band 7 (3.1, 3.2).

- **No, the sentence was dropped.** That is the band 6 pattern. Next time, finish it with a plainer word (3.1).
- **No, the sentence became a different one.** That is a restart, not a repair. Next time, fix the word and carry on (3.2).

Then make two counts on the same thirty seconds:

- **Circling sentences.** How many sentences say again what an earlier one already said (3.3)?
- **Essay connectors.** How many times did you say *firstly*, *secondly*, *in addition* or *to sum up* (3.4)?

6.3 What the counts tell you

If most of your pauses pass the test, and you have few circling sentences and no essay connectors, Fluency and Coherence is probably not what is holding your band. Look at the other three criteria in Part 4. Then try the wider checks in *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*, section 4.6, and *The 9 Wrong Speaking Habits*, Part 3. They listen for different things than this check does.

If several of your pauses fail the test, that is the place to work. Do one recording a week, not one a day. The aim is to learn to hear the line, not to make yourself nervous every time you speak.

This check is a technique for your own ear. It is not an examiner's judgement, and it cannot give you a band. To decide when Speaking is good enough and your time is better spent on another skill, *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, Part 2, has a stopping rule for each of the four skills.

The end

You started this book with an idea of band 7 that sounded close to perfect. You finish it with a narrower one. Band 7 Speaking still pauses, still looks for words, still corrects itself and still makes the odd basic mistake. What it does is finish its sentences, add something new as it goes, use the small words of speech instead of the connectors of an essay, and keep its grammar and rhythm working through a long answer.

None of that needs a new accent, a list of idioms or faster speech. It needs one question, asked of your own recordings: did the sentence finish, and does it still mean what it set out to mean?

About the transcripts. Every question and every transcript in this book was written for it. None of it is official IELTS content, and none of it is a transcription or a close copy of a real question, cue card, recording or examiner comment. The band descriptors are published on ielts.org, and this book explains them rather than reproducing them. Practising with invented examples teaches the technique; only a trained examiner's judgement of your own speaking tells you where you actually stand.

About the 2026 changes. The details in Part 2 were checked against ielts.org shortly before publication. Rules like these get adjusted over time. Confirm the current ones 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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