

## Preparing for the IELTS test with Holmesglen Institute of TAFE

### The reading component

The IELTS reading test takes one hour. In this time you are required to read three texts of between 500 and 900 words each. The texts and questions increase in difficulty. There will be around 40 questions to answer and record on the answer sheet within the 60 minutes.

Most students come out of the reading test feeling that there wasn't enough time to complete the exam paper. For this reason it is very important that you take a number of timed practice reading tests before the actual exam day to develop the skills of skimming and scanning and other timesaving strategies.

In the following pages you will find information and practice questions to prepare you to answer some of the most common types of question in the reading test:

- ◆ Summary completion
- ◆ Matching headings to paragraphs
- ◆ Identifying the writer's views
- ◆ Multiple choice
- ◆ Selecting factors
- ◆ Table completion
- ◆ Matching causes and effects
- ◆ Sentence completion
- ◆ Short answer questions

### Sample reading text

The reading text on the following page is longer than usual and is used as the basis for all the questions and examples in this section. However, in the real IELTS test the 40 or 50 questions will be based on three texts not just one, and the questions will not test your understanding of a point in the text more than once, as they may do here.

## Sample reading text

### Lessons from the Titanic

**A** From the comfort of our modern lives we tend to look back at the turn of the twentieth century as a dangerous time for sea travellers. With limited communication facilities, and shipping technology still in its infancy in the early nineteenth hundreds, we consider ocean travel to have been a risky business. But to the people of the time it was one of the safest forms of transport. At the time of the Titanic's maiden voyage in 1912, there had only been four lives lost in the previous forty years on passenger ships on the North Atlantic crossing. And the Titanic was confidently proclaimed to be unsinkable. She represented the pinnacle of technological advance at the time. Her builders, crew and passengers had no doubt that she was the finest ship ever built. But still she did sink on April 14, 1912, taking 1,517 of her passengers and crew with her.

**B** The RMS Titanic left Southampton for New York on April 10, 1912. On board were some of the richest and most famous people of the time who had paid large sums of money to sail on the first voyage of the most luxurious ship in the world. Imagine her placed on her end: she was larger at 269 metres than many of the tallest buildings of the day. And with nine decks, she was as high as an eleven storey building. The Titanic carried 329 first class, 285 second class and 710 third class passengers with 899 crew members, under the care of the very experienced Captain Edward J. Smith. She also carried enough food to feed a small town, including 40,000 fresh eggs, 36,000 apples, 111,000 lbs of fresh meat and 2,200 lbs of coffee for the five day journey.

**C** RMS Titanic was believed to be unsinkable because the hull was divided into sixteen watertight compartments. Even if two of these compartments flooded, the ship could still float. The ship's owners could not imagine that, in the case of an accident, the Titanic would not be able to float until she was rescued. It was largely as a result of this confidence in the ship and in the safety of ocean travel that the disaster could claim such a great loss of life.

**D** In the ten hours prior to the Titanic's fatal collision with an iceberg at 11.40pm, six warnings of icebergs in her path were received by the Titanic's wireless operators. Only one of these messages was formally posted on the bridge; the others were in various locations across the ship. If the combined information in these messages of iceberg positions had been plotted, the ice field which lay across the Titanic's path would have been apparent. Instead, the lack of formal procedures for dealing with information from a relatively new piece of technology, the wireless, meant that the danger was not known until too late. This was not the fault of the Titanic crew. Procedures for dealing with warnings received through the wireless had not been formalised across the shipping industry at the time. The fact that the wireless operators were not even Titanic crew, but rather contracted workers from a wireless company, made their role in the ship's operation quite unclear.

**E** Captain Smith's seemingly casual attitude in increasing the speed on this day to a dangerous 22 knots or 41 kilometres per hour, can then be partly explained by his ignorance of what lay ahead. But this only partly accounts for his actions, since the spring weather in Greenland was known to cause huge chunks of ice to break off from the glaciers. Captain Smith knew that these icebergs would float southward and had already acknowledged this danger by taking a more southerly route than at other times of the year. So why was the Titanic travelling at high speed when he knew, if not of the specific risk, at least of the general risk of icebergs in her path? As with the lack of coordination of the wireless messages, it was simply standard operating procedure at the time. Captain Smith was following the practices accepted on the North Atlantic, practices which had coincided with forty years of safe travel. He believed, wrongly as we now know, that the ship could turn or stop in time if an iceberg was sighted by the lookouts.

**F** There were around two and a half hours between the time the Titanic rammed into the iceberg and its final submersion. In this time 705 people were loaded into the twenty lifeboats. There were 473 empty seats available on lifeboats while over 1,500 people drowned. These figures raise two important issues. Firstly, why there were not enough lifeboats to seat every passenger and crew member on board. And secondly, why the lifeboats were not full.

**G** The Titanic had sixteen lifeboats and four collapsible boats which could carry just over half the number of people on board her maiden voyage and only a third of the Titanic's total capacity. Regulations for the number of lifeboats required were based on outdated British Board of Trade regulations written in 1894 for ships a quarter of the Titanic's size, and had never been revised. Under these requirements, the Titanic was only obliged to carry enough lifeboats to seat 962 people. At design meetings in 1910, the shipyard's managing director, Alexander Carlisle, had proposed that forty eight lifeboats be installed on the Titanic, but the idea had been quickly rejected as too expensive. Discussion then turned to the ship's décor, and as Carlisle later described the incident ... 'we spent two hours discussing carpet for the first class cabins and fifteen minutes discussing lifeboats'.

**H** The belief that the Titanic was unsinkable was so strong that passengers and crew alike clung to the belief even as she was actually sinking. This attitude was not helped by Captain Smith, who had not acquainted his senior officers with the full situation. For the first hour after the collision, the majority of people aboard the Titanic, including senior crew, were not aware that she would sink, that there were insufficient lifeboats or that the nearest ship responding to the Titanic's distress calls would arrive two hours after she was on the bottom of the ocean. As a result, the officers in charge of loading the boats received a very half-hearted response to their early calls for women and children to board the lifeboats. People felt that they would be safer, and certainly warmer, aboard the Titanic than perched in a little boat in the North Atlantic Ocean. Not realising the magnitude of the impending disaster themselves, the officers allowed several boats to be lowered only half full.

**I** Procedures again were at fault, as an additional reason for the officers' reluctance to lower the lifeboats at full capacity was that they feared the lifeboats would buckle under the weight of 65 people. They had not been informed that the lifeboats had been fully tested prior to departure. Such procedures as assigning passengers and crew to lifeboats and lifeboat loading drills were simply not part of the standard operation of ships nor were they included in crew training at this time.

**J** As the Titanic sank, another ship, believed to have been the Californian, was seen motionless less than twenty miles away. The ship failed to respond to the Titanic's eight distress rockets. Although the officers of the Californian tried to signal the Titanic with their flashing Morse lamp, they did not wake up their radio operator to listen for a distress call. At this time, communication at sea through wireless was new and the benefits not well appreciated, so the wireless on ships was often not operated around the clock. In the case of the Californian, the wireless operator slept unaware while 1,500 Titanic passengers and crew drowned only a few miles away.

**K** After the Titanic sank, investigations were held in both Washington and London. In the end, both inquiries decided that no one could be blamed for the sinking. However, they did address the fundamental safety issues which had contributed to the enormous loss of life. As a result, international agreements were drawn up to improve safety procedures at sea. The new regulations covered 24 hour wireless operation, crew training, proper lifeboat drills, lifeboat capacity for all on board and the creation of an international ice patrol.

## Reading task type one: summary completion

### Task description

The input for this type of question will be a summary of all or part of the reading text. The summary will contain a number of gaps. All of the information in the summary will be contained in the reading text, although the words used will be different. You will also be provided with a list of words to use to fill the gaps. There will be more words than gaps. These words have been chosen so that only one word will be suitable for each gap (the answer) but other words may appear suitable (distracters).

Your task is to complete the summary using one word from the list for each gap. Because the summary is a paraphrase of the reading text (rather than an edited version), you will need to have a good understanding of the overall meaning and main points of the section summarised, rather than a detailed understanding of the text.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ skim the text for information
- ◆ paraphrase the original text

## Sample task

Complete the summary below. Choose your answers from the box at the bottom of the page and write them in boxes 1-8 on your answer sheet.

**NB** There are more words than spaces so you will not use them all. You may use any of the words more than once.

### List of Words

passengers	happy	float	advanced
lifeboats	confident	dangers	ocean
worried	inadequate	enormous	excitement
fast	handbook	water	afloat
record	fast	procedures	orders
drown	size	sink	safety

## The Finest Ship Ever Built

The North Atlantic Ocean crossing on the Titanic was expected to set a new standard for ...(1)... travel in terms of comfort and ...(2)... The shipping industry had an excellent safety ...(3)... on the North Atlantic Crossing over the previous forty years and the Titanic was the finest and safest liner ever built. The Titanic combined the greatest technology of the day with sheer ...(4)..., luxury and new safety features. The Titanic's owners were ...(5)... that even if the Titanic were letting in ...(6)... she would ...(7)... indefinitely until help arrived. In hindsight we know that the Titanic was not unsinkable and that technology alone could not save lives when facilities were ...(8)... and humans did not follow safe ...(9)... whether because of arrogance or ignorance.

Answer key	
1.	ocean
2.	safety
3.	record
4.	size
5.	confident
6.	water
7.	float
8.	inadequate
9.	procedures

## Answer key: The Finest Ship Ever Built

The North Atlantic Ocean crossing on the Titanic was expected to set a new standard for **ocean** travel in terms of comfort and **safety**. The shipping industry had an excellent **record** on the North Atlantic Crossing over the previous forty years and the Titanic was the finest and safest liner ever built. The Titanic combined the greatest technology of the day with sheer **size**, luxury and new safety features. The Titanic's owners were **confident** that even if the Titanic were letting in **water**, she would **float** indefinitely until help arrived. In hindsight we know that the Titanic was not unsinkable and that technology alone could not save lives when facilities were **inadequate** and humans did not follow safe **procedures** whether because of arrogance or ignorance.

## How to approach summary completion questions

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that in this case you have to choose your answers from the words provided. Also note that in this case you can use any word more than once. Remember though that every IELTS test is different. So make sure that you read the instructions carefully even if you have practised the type of question before.
- Step 2:** Skim through the summary to get an idea of the topic. In this case the summary refers generally to peoples' views about the Titanic in terms of safety.
- Step 3:** Decide which section of the text the summary covers – in this case mainly paragraphs A and C. In some cases the summary may cover the whole text.
- Step 4:** Read through the summary, referring to the list of words each time you reach a gap. Select one or more possible words from the list to fill each gap. Reject any words that do not fit grammatically, even if the meaning seems correct. Confirm your choice by referring to the relevant sections of the text.
- Step 5:** Quickly read through your completed summary to check that it makes sense.

## Reading task type two: matching headings to paragraphs

### Task description

In this type of question, you will be given a list of headings. The instructions will also indicate around 4 to 6 paragraphs from the reading text. The task is to find the most suitable heading for each of the paragraphs. There will be more headings than paragraphs, and you shouldn't use any heading more than once unless the instructions tell you that you can.

To complete this task well, you will need to be able to identify each paragraph's main focus. The correct heading will sum up the main idea of the paragraph.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ Identify the main idea of a paragraph

### Sample task

Choose the heading which best sums up the primary cause of the problem described in paragraphs D, E, G, H and I of the text. Write the appropriate numbers (i – x) in the boxes on your answer sheet.

<b>List of Headings</b>	
i	Ignorance of the impending disaster
ii	Captain's orders ignored
iii	Captain's over-confidence
iv	Rough sea conditions
v	Faulty design
vi	Iceberg locations not plotted
vii	Low priority placed on safety
viii	Number of lifeboats adequate
ix	Inadequate training
x	Ice warnings ignored

<b>Answer key</b>	
Paragraph D	vi
Paragraph E	iii
Paragraph G	vii
Paragraph H	i
Paragraph I	ix

## How to approach matching headings to paragraphs

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that the heading you choose should sum up the main idea of the paragraph. Also note which paragraphs you need to look at, as you are often not required to do them all.
- Step 2:** Familiarise yourself with the list of paragraph headings by skimming through them quickly.
- Step 3:** Read through the first paragraph for which you have to find a heading. Remember that you are reading to find out the main idea of the paragraph. Concentrate on the main idea or focus of the paragraph and try not to be distracted by details or by unfamiliar vocabulary.
- Step 4:** Choose the heading from the list which best sums up the main point of the paragraph you have just read. If you can't choose between two headings, go on to the next paragraph – you can come back to that question later. But don't forget to make a choice before the end of the test because if you leave a blank or you have marked two answers on your answer sheet, you will be graded as incorrect for that question.

## Reading task type three: identifying the writer's views

### Task description

In this task type you will be given a number of statements. You will have to decide if these statements agree with the writer's views.

To complete this task well you will often need to be able to recognise the writer's views not only from what is said directly, but also from what is implied. For example, we do not need the writer to state directly that he/she disapproves of zoos. We can infer this disapproval if the writer states his/her disapproval of the following: animals being taken from the wild, animals being caged, people paying money to see animals, animals not having any privacy. However, if the writer simply describes the problems with zoos this does not necessarily imply disapproval.

Also, we should not try to guess the writer's views. In statement 5 of the sample task on the following page, we should not assume that because **we** think that the lifeboats should have rescued more people, or because 'everybody' thinks that the lifeboats should have returned to rescue more people, that this is the **writer's** view. In this case the writer does not express any view on this issue; she simply states the fact that the lifeboats were not full and so the answer must be **Not Given**.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ identify opinion and attitude
- ◆ skim for detailed information
- ◆ make inferences

## Sample task

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in the reading passage? In boxes 1-7 on your answer sheet write:

- Yes** If the statement agrees with the writer  
**No** If the statement contradicts the writer  
**Not Given** If it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

1. The enormous loss of life on the Titanic was primarily caused by inadequate equipment, training and procedures.
2. Nobody had thought of installing enough lifeboats to accommodate all the passengers and crew in the event of an emergency.
3. Captain Smith didn't inform his officers of the true situation because he didn't want to cause a panic.
4. The lifeboats would have buckled if they had been fully loaded.
5. After the Titanic sank the lifeboats which were not full should have returned to rescue as many people from the water as they could.
6. The Captain of the Californian could have brought his ship to the rescue if he had realised that the Titanic was sinking.
7. The sinking of the Titanic prompted an overhaul of standard operating procedures which made ocean travel much safer.

Answer key	
1.	Yes
2.	No
3.	Not Given
4.	No
5.	Not Given
6.	Yes
7.	Yes

## How to approach questions requiring you to identify the writer's views

**Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that you are asked to identify the writer's opinion, which may not necessarily be the same as the facts. Note also the difference between the three categories you have to use, particularly:

<b>No</b>	The statement contradicts the writer.
<b>Not Given</b>	The writer does not give an opinion on this point.

**Step 2:** Skim through all of the statements to get an idea of the topics you will be searching for in your reading of the text.

**Step 3:** Read the first statement again more carefully. Note the main point or opinion given in the statement.

**Step 4:** Skim the text for the section which refers to that idea. If you come across information relating to other statements, put a mark beside the section so that you can find it quickly again later.

**Step 5:** Once you have found the appropriate section of the text, read more carefully. Decide if the statement agrees with the view of the author (mark **Yes** on your answer sheet) or disagrees with the author (mark **No** on your answer sheet). If the author doesn't give an opinion which agrees or disagrees with the statement then mark **Not Given** on your answer sheet.

## Reading task type four: multiple choice

### Task description

In this question type you will be given a 'stem' which may be an incomplete sentence or a question. The stem will be followed by three or four options – one will be correct (the answer) and three may seem possible but are in fact incorrect in some way (the distracters).

In tackling this type of question, it is very important to read the stem carefully. Candidates often make careless mistakes when they misread the stem and so choose the wrong option.

### What is being tested

Multiple choice questions can be designed to test a wide variety of reading skills. The questions may require you to have an overall understanding of the main points of the text as in Question 1 of the sample task, in which case you will need to be able to read for gist. Or they may require you to have a detailed understanding of particular points as in questions 2 and 3 of the Sample Task, in which case you will need to be able to read for specific details. Multiple choice questions may also ask you to identify facts or opinions in the text.

## Sample task

Choose the appropriate letters A-D and write your answers in boxes 1-3 on your answer sheet.

1. Which is most at fault for the magnitude of the Titanic disaster?
  - A. The ship
  - B. The Titanic's owners and builders
  - C. Standard operating procedure
  - D. The captain and crew
  
2. The number of lifeboats on the Titanic ...
  - A. would have been sufficient if all boats had been filled to capacity
  - B. met the regulations for much smaller ships but not the Titanic
  - C. had been designed in 1894 by the British Board of Trade
  - D. could carry more people than required under the regulations
  
3. The Titanic was ...
  - A. higher than the tallest buildings of her day
  - B. divided into 16 watertight compartments
  - C. unsinkable
  - D. the most technologically advanced liner of her time

Answer key	
1.	C
2.	B
3.	D

## How to approach multiple choice questions

**Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully

**Step 2:** Skim all the questions briefly to get an idea of the topics for which you will be searching when reading the text.

**Step 3:** Read the first question again more carefully. Decide what you will need to read to answer the question. Is the question asking you for a particular detail that you need to find in the text? Or is the question asking you for an answer which requires a global understanding of the whole text?

**Step 4:** Once you have decided the best strategy for dealing with the question (as above), you will need to proceed to read the text in the appropriate manner, for example reading for gist, reading for detail etc.

## Reading task type five: selecting factors

### Task description

You will be provided with a number of statements some of which paraphrase or summarise what the writer said. In this task type you need to show that you know what information the writer did (and did not) mention on a particular topic.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ skim and scan the text for details
- ◆ understand paraphrase
- ◆ understand inference

### Sample task

The writer mentions a number of factors related to poor communication which contributed to the disaster. Which 3 of the following factors are mentioned? Write your answers (A-H) in boxes 1-3 on your answer sheet.

- A. The Titanic was travelling too fast.
- B. Ships were not required to operate their wireless continually.
- C. There were insufficient lifeboats on the ship.
- D. The Titanic's wireless was not operating around the clock.
- E. Ice warnings were not dealt with systematically.
- F. The Californian's wireless had broken down.
- G. The Titanic's wireless had broken down.
- H. Captain Smith did not give his officers enough information.

Answer key	
1.	B
2.	E
3.	H

## How to approach questions where you have to select factors

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that only three of the factors are correct. Note also that the instructions in this sample task tell you what topic to focus on. In this case the instructions tell you to focus on poor communication as a contributing factor in the disaster. Although other factors may have contributed to the disaster (such as A and C) only the three correct answers focus on poor communication as a contributing factor.
- Step 2:** Read through the list of factors.
- Step 3:** Scan the text and find the sections or paragraphs which discuss poor communication.
- Step 4:** Read those sections carefully and select the appropriate three factors.

## Reading task type six: table completion

### Task description

You will be provided with an incomplete table which summarises or paraphrases information given in the reading text. The information in table form may be organised differently from the way in which it appears in the text, for example chronologically instead of in order of importance. The task is to complete the gaps in three words or fewer.

### What is being tested is your ability to

- ◆ skim for specific information
- ◆ understand gist and paraphrase

### Sample task

Complete the table below using information from the reading passage. Write no more than three words for each answer. Write your answers in boxes 1-8 on your answer sheet.

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Cause of the problem</b>	<b>Regulated after the Titanic disaster? (Write Yes, No or Doesn't say)</b>
Position of icebergs not plotted	... (1) ... scattered all over the ship	Doesn't say
Insufficient lifeboats	... (2) ... regulations	... (3) ...
Lifeboats not full	a) ignorance of the extent of the danger	... (4) ...
	b) fear that the lifeboats would ... (5) ...	... (6) ...
Californian didn't listen to the distress calls	No ... (7) ... wireless operation	... (8) ...

Answer key	
1.	Ice warnings / wireless messages
2.	Out dated / out of date
3.	Yes
4.	Doesn't say
5.	Buckle
6.	Yes
7.	24 hour
8.	Yes

## How to approach table completion tasks

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that in the sample task you may use your own words if you wish, based on the information in the reading text. In other cases you will be instructed to use the words from the reading text only. Note also that here you may write only three words or fewer.
- Step 2:** Look at the table and especially any headings. Decide which is the most useful way to read the table. In this case you need to read it horizontally to answer the questions. Glance at the other information given in the table to get an idea of what information you will be searching for when you read.
- Step 3:** Look at the first row under the headings. Decide what key ideas you will need to search for as you skim the reading text. Decide also what information you will need to complete the first gap. For example, in the sample task you will skim for a paragraph or section discussing icebergs not being plotted because something was scattered all over the ship. What was that something?
- Step 4:** Skim the text for the appropriate paragraph or section.
- Step 5:** Read that section more carefully and decide on the best word or words to fill the gap. Remember that you will need to use the appropriate form of any verbs.

## Reading task type seven: matching causes and effects

### Task description

You will be provided with two lists. In most cases, one list contains a small number of causes and the other list contains a larger number of effects. The task is to find the effect which arose from (matches) each cause. To complete this task well you will need to understand clearly what the words 'cause' and 'effect' mean.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ understand cause and effect relationships
- ◆ understand gist and paraphrase
- ◆ skim for information

### Sample task

The reading passage describes a number of cause and effect relationships. Match each cause (1-4) in List A with its effect (A-H) in List B. Write your answers (A-H) in boxes 1-4 on your answer sheet.

**NB** There are more effects in List B than you will need, so you will not use all of them. You may use any effect more than once if you wish.

List A: Causes	List B: Effects
1. Outdated regulations designed for much smaller ships	A. Lack of lifeboat training and drills
2. Captain Smith's failure to communicate sufficient information to officers	B. More than two of the watertight compartments filled with water
3. No requirements for 24 hour a day wireless operation	C. Locations of icebergs received in ice warnings were not plotted
4. Lack of procedures for dealing with wireless messages	D. Half full lifeboats did not return to rescue people
	E. Nearby ship did not come to Titanic's rescue
	F. Not enough lifeboats
	G. Passengers panicked
	H. Lifeboats were not fully loaded

Answer key	
1.	F
2.	H
3.	E
4.	C

## How to approach questions which ask you to match causes and effects

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully.
- Step 2:** Look at the table and decide which list you should work from. In most cases it would be most efficient to work from the shorter list (usually the causes).
- Step 3:** Read the first cause.
- Step 4:** Briefly familiarise yourself with the effects list. Which effects seem possible at this stage?
- Step 5:** Skim the reading text to find the section which discusses the first cause.
- Step 6:** Read that section of the reading text carefully to find the effect.
- Step 7:** When you have found the effect in the reading passage, refer back to the effects list and select the one which best paraphrases the information in the reading text. If none of the effects listed seem to match, then keep reading the text, as it is not unusual for causes to have more than one effect.

## Reading task type eight: sentence completion

### Task description

You will be provided with a number of incomplete sentences which you need to complete using information from the reading text. Generally you must complete the statement in three words or fewer, but confirm this with the instructions.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ skim for general information
- ◆ read for details
- ◆ understand paraphrase in the incomplete sentences

### Sample task

Complete the sentences below using words taken from the reading passage. Use no more than three words for each answer. Write your answers in boxes 1-3 on your answer sheet.

1. One positive outcome was that the inquiries into the Titanic disaster sought to improve safety procedures by initiating ...(1)...
2. The Titanic's safety feature, which convinced most people that she wouldn't sink, was her ...(2)...
3. Passenger ships across the North Atlantic Ocean had had an excellent safety record in the ...(3)...

Answer key	
1.	international agreements / new regulations
2.	sixteen watertight compartments
3.	previous forty years

## How to approach sentence completion questions

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that in the sample task you must only use words from the reading passage, and that you may use no more than three words to complete each sentence.
- Step 2:** Briefly read through all the incomplete sentences to get an idea of what information you will have to find in the text.
- Step 3:** Read the first sentence more carefully. Decide what information you will need. In this case, you will look for a section discussing inquiries about improving safety procedures.
- Step 4:** Once you have found the relevant section of the reading text, look back at the incomplete sentence and decide what specific information you need to complete it. In this case, you need to find what was initiated.
- Step 5:** Read that part of the text more carefully to find the answer. Remember that the correct answer you find in the text should fit the incomplete sentence grammatically. If not, you may need to look for another answer.

In some IELTS tests the instructions will not say 'using words taken from the text', in which case you can use your own words or change the form of the words in the reading text.

## Reading task type nine: short answer questions

### Task description

You will be provided with a number of questions which you have to answer. Generally your answers must be in three words or fewer but confirm this with the instructions.

### What is being tested is your ability to:

- ◆ skim for general information
- ◆ read for details
- ◆ identify the focus of the question
- ◆ understand paraphrase in the question

### Sample task

Using no more than three words, answer the following questions. Write your answers in boxes 1-3 on your answer sheet.

1. Alexander Carlisle implied that the Titanic's owners were more concerned about the ship's appearance than what?
2. The laws of which government regulated the lifeboat requirements that the Titanic conformed to in 1912?
3. What term used in the passage tells the reader that this was the Titanic's first journey?

Answer key	
1.	safety / lifeboats
2.	Britain / the British government
3.	maiden

## How to approach short answer questions

- Step 1:** Read the instructions carefully. Note that in the sample task you may use your own words but you may not use more than three words for each answer.
- Step 2:** Briefly read through all of the questions to get an idea of what information you will have to find in the text.
- Step 3:** Read the first question more carefully. Decide what information you will skim for. In this case you will skim for reference to Alexander Carlisle.
- Step 4:** Once you have found the relevant section of the reading text, look back at the question and decide what specific information you need to answer the question. In this case, you need to find what the owners thought was less important than Titanic's appearance.
- Step 5:** Read that part of the text more carefully to find the answer.
- Step 6:** Your answer does not need to be a complete sentence but it does need to make sense grammatically.