

Lion's Voice

City & 
Guilds

Special Edition

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Listen
twice
& prove
your
ability!

All recordings in the listening part of the City & Guilds IESOL examinations **will be heard twice as of October 2010.**

George Vassilakis, Director of Language Certification at PEOPLECERT S.A., explains why this makes the assessment of listening comprehension fairer and more reliable.

In a typical listening comprehension test, candidates often have to be put in quite a challenging, but also unnatural, position:

-  they are required to **eavesdrop** on monologues and conversations which were not intended for their ears
-  they cannot **see** the speakers and have no clue who the speakers are, where they are or why they are talking
-  they cannot **interact** with the speakers and negotiate meaning, as the speakers are actually pre-recorded, not live
-  they have to **read** questions at the same time as listening: so they are required to simultaneously process both the aural and the written input in order to come up with the right answer

Perhaps it is not surprising, given these circumstances, that a lot of foreign language students complain about how hard listening tests are. And yet, the above seem to be inherent limitations of listening tests:

✿ it is essential that the learner should demonstrate they can understand language that is not addressed to them so that their comprehension of different speech genres can be assessed

✿ it is essential that for at least some of the questions no background or context is provided, as skills like identifying the context, the purpose or the overall topic of the input need to be tested

✿ it is essential that a listening test should include recorded, rather than live, speech so that all candidates are exposed to the same input and the test can be standardised;

✿ it is also essential that the candidates' comprehension should be tested, at least in part, by means of questions which involve reading and writing so that the learners' ability to infer meaning or transfer information can be tested.

The City & Guilds IESOL examinations have, since their alignment with the Common European Framework in 2008, acknowledged these limitations and addressed the issues involved in the following ways:

✿ Pauses have been incorporated in the recordings to allow the candidates time to read and process the questions and think about their answers

✿ Picture-based tasks have been included in the lower levels to minimise the amount of written language that needs to be processed

✿ The spoken texts themselves have been less dense and have included more redundancy (repetition of information content in different ways) so that the candidates get more processing time while they listen

✿ More context has been provided in the tasks that are based on a series of short dialogues by increasing the number of turns in these dialogues

✿ All of the recordings in the lower level examinations and some of the recordings in the more advanced level examinations have been heard twice.

As of October 2010, what changes is that all recordings will be heard twice, regardless of the level or task type. This is so that the candidates' success or failure in the listening test reflects the candidate's level of ability and their performance is not affected by other constraints, such as lack of processing time or even momentary lapses of attention. Thus, we can ensure that information processing on the candidates' part is complete and that the time it may take them to transfer information does not interfere with their comprehension of the spoken message, resulting in a fairer test that yields even more accurate results.