

IELTS Listening – Expressions which make it easier to spot the answer

What expressions are used or could be used in an IELTS Listening text to show that the thing the speaker is saying isn't actually so, and therefore probably isn't the answer to the listening task (e.g. "..., but I was wrong")?

What expressions are used or could be used to show that the real answer was just said or is about to be said (e.g. "and so we decided...")?

Without looking below, listen to your teacher read out a typical IELTS Listening expression and try to guess whether the answer to the question is likely to be the thing that they mention (X) or something just before or after that (Not X). Hold up the card you guess it must be.

Do the same thing by reading the sentences below.

Check your answers as a class or with the answer key.

Play the same game in pairs or groups.

Speaking practice

Start one Not X sentence below and see if your partner can think of a realistic way of completing it, e.g. "You might think that most people like hot weather" "but actually most prefer spring or autumn".

Phrases to classify

1. "..., but for some reason X."
2. "A wise man once said X."
3. "Again, X."
4. "Although I didn't expect X,..."
5. "Although I wasn't sure about X,..."
6. "Anyway, X."
7. "Apparently, X."
8. "As expected, X."
9. "As far back as I can remember, X."
10. "As I said earlier, X."
11. "As most people think, X."
12. "As much as I X, ..."
13. "As the proverb goes, X."
14. "As usual, X."
15. "At first, X..."
16. "At one time X"
17. "But the main attraction is X."
18. "Despite my doubts about X, ..."
19. "Despite recommending X, ..."
20. "Even today, X."
21. "Ever since then, X."
22. "He claims that it is X."
23. "I assumed X."
24. "I can see why you might think X."
25. "I don't intend to suggest that X."
26. "I ended up X."
27. "I even X."
28. "I expected X and that was the case."
29. "I expected X but (in fact) ..."
30. "I forgot to mention that X."
31. "I had started off by X."
32. "I put off X."
33. "I think X, but just let me check. Yes, I was right."
34. "I thought X too, then..."
35. "I'd expected X."
36. "I'm afraid X..."
37. "I'm available X."
38. "I'm happy to report that X."
39. "If you're interested in this, then you'll have to X."
40. "In particular, X."
41. "In spite of X,..."
42. "In the end, X."
43. "It has more to do with X."
44. "It is commonly thought that X."
45. "It is well known that X."

46. "It isn't enough (by itself) to X."
47. "It used to be X."
48. "It wouldn't help to X."
49. "It's impossible to X."
50. "It's only a matter of time before X."
51. "It's very important to X."
52. "Let's make it X."
53. "Many believe that X."
54. "Many people have heard that X, and that is indeed so."
55. "More typically, X."
56. "Most people think X."
57. "My initial impression was X."
58. "My original idea was X."
59. "My parents had been saying that X."
60. "My philosophy on this is X."
61. "Particularly, X."
62. "Priority is given to X."
63. "Rather than X,..."
64. "So, as a result, X."
65. "The consensus is X."
66. "The first thing is to X."
67. "The plan was X."
68. "Then it must be X."
69. "There (once) was X."
70. "There was a consensus on X."
71. "They didn't go as far as to X."
72. "Unfortunately, X..."
73. "Unlike X,..."
74. "We are going to X."
75. "We can't go beyond X."
76. "We do have X."
77. "We found that X."
78. "We haven't only thought of that, but also X."
79. "We intend to X."
80. "We must assume that X."
81. "We settled on X."
82. "We sorted it out by X."
83. "We were going to X."
84. "We were planning to X."
85. "We'll be too busy to X."
86. "We're going to get someone to X."
87. "We've addressed this problem by X."
88. "We've agreed to X."
89. "What I actually chose to do was X."
90. "What really stood out was X."
91. "What struck me was X."

92. "What you can't do is X."
93. "X, (and) in fact,..."
94. "X and it continues to do so."
95. "X, (and) that is the case."
96. "X, (and) that remains the case."
97. "X (but) actually,..."
98. "X (but) in reality..."
99. "X but (it seems that) I was mistaken."
100. "X but in fact..."
101. "X is indeed..."
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103. "X is supposed to..."
104. "X might be better."
105. "X still hasn't..."
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114. "X, but that wasn't the case."
115. "X, but the one that stands out for me is..."
116. "X, which is also my view."
117. "X. (A host of) studies confirm this."
118. "X. (So) I'll do that."
119. "X. And I also..."
120. "X. And that's what she did."
121. "X. Having said that..."
122. "X. However,..."
123. "X. I meant to say..."
124. "X. I was mistaken,..."
125. "X. I was turned down."
126. "X. I wasn't eligible."
127. "X. Instead of that, we hope to..."
128. "X. It has more to do with this than with..."
129. "X. Let me check. Yes, that's right."
130. "X. My mistake,..."
131. "X. Silly me!..."
132. "X. So, we settled on that."
133. "X. Sorry, I mean..."
134. "X. Sorry,..."
135. "X. The issue was that I had overlooked..."
136. "X. The trouble with that is..."
137. "X. This is complicated by the fact that..."

138. "X. This turned out to be misguided."
139. "X. Whoops,..."
140. "X." "(That) sounds good."
141. "X." "Certainly."
142. "X." "Exactly."
143. "X." "Fine."
144. "X." "Hmm, I'm not sure."
145. "X." "I can see why you might think so."
146. "X." "I don't think that's such a good idea."
147. "X." "I don't think we could cope with that."
148. "X." "I suppose you're right."
149. "X." "I think that's fair."
150. "X." "I wanted something that was more..."
151. "X." "I would if it was..."
152. "X." "I'd much sooner do something else."
153. "X." "I'll give it a miss."
154. "X." "I'll put that down as a definite."
155. "X." "It has yet to happen."
156. "X." "It sounds fine."
157. "X." "It's slightly less than that."
158. "X." "No problem."
159. "X." "Not necessarily."
160. "X." "Not quite."
161. "X." "That's a great help."
162. "X." "That's not due to start until..."
163. "X." "That's okay (thanks)."
164. "X." "That's too..."
165. "X." "The only one closed down last year."
166. "X." "To be honest,..."
167. "X." "We need to be more realistic."
168. "X." "We'll leave that out then."
169. "X." "That should be all right."
170. "You (might also) need to think about X."
171. "You could X."
172. "You don't have to X."
173. "You might think that X."
174. "You mustn't always assume that X."

Suggested answers

Note that most of these depend on context, so could change in less common sentences.

1. "..., but for some reason X." – X
2. "A wise man once said X." – X
3. "Again, X." – X
4. "Although I didn't expect X,..." – X
5. "Although I wasn't sure about X,..." – X
6. "Anyway, X." – X
7. "Apparently, X." – X
8. "As expected, X." – X
9. "As far back as I can remember, X." – X
10. "As I said earlier, X." – X
11. "As most people think, X." – X
12. "As much as I X, ..." – Not X
13. "As the proverb goes, X." – X
14. "As usual, X." – X
15. "At first, X..." – Not X
16. "At one time X" – Not X
17. "But the main attraction is X." – X
18. "Despite my doubts about X, ..." – X
19. "Despite recommending X, ..." – Not X
20. "Even today, X." – X
21. "Ever since then, X." – X
22. "He claims that it is X." – Not X
23. "I assumed X." – Not X
24. "I can see why you might think X." – Not X
25. "I don't intend to suggest that X." – Not X
26. "I ended up X." – X
27. "I even X." – X
28. "I expected X and that was the case." – X
29. "I expected X but (in fact) ..." – Not X
30. "I forgot to mention that X." – X
31. "I had started off by X." – Not X
32. "I put off X." – Not X
33. "I think X, but just let me check. Yes, I was right." – X
34. "I thought X too, then..." – Not X
35. "I'd expected X." – Not X
36. "I'm afraid X..." – Not X
37. "I'm available X." – X
38. "I'm happy to report that X." – X
39. "If you're interested in this, then you'll have to X." – X
40. "In particular, X." – X
41. "In spite of X,..." – Not X
42. "In the end, X." – X
43. "It has more to do with X." – X
44. "It is commonly thought that X." – Not X

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46. "It isn't enough (by itself) to X." – Not X
47. "It used to be X." – Not X
48. "It wouldn't help to X." – Not X
49. "It's impossible to X." – Not X
50. "It's only a matter of time before X." – X
51. "It's very important to X." – X
52. "Let's make it X." – X
53. "Many believe that X." – Not X
54. "Many people have heard that X, and that is indeed so." – X
55. "More typically, X." – X
56. "Most people think X." – Not X
57. "My initial impression was X." – Not X
58. "My original idea was X." – Not X
59. "My parents had been saying that X."
60. "My philosophy on this is X." – X
61. "Particularly, X." – X
62. "Priority is given to X." – X
63. "Rather than X,..." – Not X
64. "So, as a result, X." – X
65. "The consensus is X." – X
66. "The first thing is to X." – X
67. "The plan was X." – Not X
68. "Then it must be X." – X
69. "There (once) was X." – Not X
70. "There was a consensus on X." – X
71. "They didn't go as far as to X." – Not X
72. "Unfortunately, X..." – Not X
73. "Unlike X,..." – Not X
74. "We are going to X." – X
75. "We can't go beyond X." – X
76. "We do have X." – X
77. "We found that X." – X
78. "We haven't only thought of that, but also X." – X
79. "We intend to X." – X
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81. "We settled on X." – X
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172. "You don't have to X." – Not X
173. "You might think that X." – Not X
174. "You mustn't always assume that X." – Not X

Cards to be cut out and held up
Make a copy of one each for each student.

X	Not X
X	Not X
X	Not X
X	Not X
X	Not X
X	Not X
X	Not X

Brainstorming stage

First of all without looking above, try to write suitable phrases in the four categories below. Many more phrases not above are also possible.

Phrases which show that the last thing that was said wasn't the correct answer

Phrases which show that the next thing that will be said won't be the correct answer

Phrases which show that the last thing that was said was the right answer

Phrases which show that the next thing that will be said will be the right answer

Look above for more ideas, brainstorm more, then compare your extra ideas as a class.