

Speaking Skills

in the Academic Context



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Chapter 2: Fluency and Coherence (FC)

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the marking criteria of Fluency and Coherence (FC) in IELTS Speaking test
- Distinguish positive features that lead to a higher band score
- Avoid long pauses

There are four marking criteria in IELTS speaking test, namely Fluency and Coherence (FC), Lexical Resource (LR), Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GA) and Pronunciation (PN). In this chapter, we will focus on the marking criteria of Fluency and Coherence (FC) by looking at the positive features and pauses made by candidates of different bands.

Part I. What does Fluency and Coherence (FC) mean?

Fluency and Coherence (FC) refers to the ability to talk with normal levels of continuity, rate and effort and to link ideas and language together to form coherent, connected speech. The key indicators of fluency are speech rate and speech continuity. The key indicators of coherence are logical sequencing of sentences, clear marking of stages in a discussion, narration or argument, and the use of cohesive devices (e.g., connectors, pronouns and conjunctions) within and between sentences (*IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test*, 2019).

Check out this IELTS official video to know more about FC: <https://youtu.be/2SI0twnNEN8>

How candidates perform in each Band? (IELTS Home of the IELTS English Language Test, 2019)

Band 4

- cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction
- links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence

Band 5

- usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going
- may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers
- produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems

Band 6

- is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation
- uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately

Band 7

- speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence
- may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction
- uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility

Band 8

- speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language
- develops topics coherently and appropriately

Band 9

- speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction
- any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar
- speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features
- develops topics fully and appropriately

Here are the key indicators determining your marks in FC:

1. Length
2. Speech rate
3. Repetition
4. Self-correction
5. Pausing
 - a. Filled pause
 - b. Silent pause
 - c. Silent pause at the end of a phrase/clause/sentence

Filled pause is referred to the meaningless words such as 'uh', 'em' and 'ah'.

These five are the elements that contribute to the Fluency area. As presented by IELTS, the examiners will take your speech rate and continuity into account. Therefore, you should practice speaking in a natural speech without too many pauses. When giving your responses in part 3, answers with some lengths are expected. Occasionally self-corrections are acceptable. In the corpus, silent pauses are counted if the duration is longer than 0.1s.

6. Employment of discourse markers and connectives

To produce coherent speech, appropriate use of discourse markers (e.g., to begin with, as a result) and connectives (e.g., although, however) is very important. This will also make your ideas and sentences easier to follow.

Activity 1. Filled pause and silent pause

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Take a look at the FC performance of [Speaker 72](#) (Band 9.0). Can you find any filled pause and silent pause (duration ≥ 0.4 s)?

Activity 2. Which is a better answer?

Question: Tell me about the place you are living. (On Length)

- A. I still live in the same neighbourhood I grew up in. It used to be a bit boring but now there are loads of shops and restaurants.
- B. I grew up in Wakra. Wakra was boring.

Activity 3. Repetition and Self-correction

Go to the corpus and take a look at the performance of any Band 5.0 speaker. Can you list at least one repetition and self-correction?

Repetition:

Self-correction:

Part II. What are the features of a high-band performance?

Now you know there are some key indicators in FC. How can these indicators be reflected in speakers' performance? Generally, speakers with higher Band (7.0 or above) can successfully employ various discourse markers and connectives. Their speech is usually longer in length so more information can be provided within one response. The table below has summarised a comparison between speakers of different Bands in terms of Fluency and Coherence.

	Features from speakers of Band 7.0 or higher	Features from speakers of Band 7.0 below
Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Repetitions ↓ Filled pause ↓ Silent pause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ Repetitions ↑ Filled pause ↑ Silent pause

	↓ Silent pause at the end of a phrase/clause/sentence ✓ Self-corrections ✓ Proper speech rate ✓ Response in proper length	↑ Silent pause at the end of a phrase/clause/sentence ? Self-corrections ? Proper speech rate ? Response in proper length
Coherence	✓ Connectives ✓ Discourse markers	✓ Connectives ? Discourse markers

Legends:

- ↓ : Seldom occur
 ↑ : Often occur
 ✓ : Achieved / used
 ? : May not achieve / use

Activity 4. Searching the corpus

Question 1: In [Speaker 9](#), how many discourse markers and connectives have been identified? Can you give two examples?

Question 2: In [Speaker 56](#), how many discourse markers and connectives have been identified? Can you give two examples?

Activity 5. How fast do they speak?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Look at the general comments for any two speakers (one should be from Band 5.0 / 5.5 and another one should be from Band 8.0 / 8.5). Can you tell how fast they speak?

	Speech rate
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Speaker _____ Band _____	
Speaker _____ Band _____	

Part III. Pausing in the speech

Activity 6. What are the pauses?

Go to the corpus and use the ‘Search’ function. After selecting the Band of speakers and ‘Fluency and Coherence’ as the criteria, how many types of pauses can you find? What are they?

Example: Filled Pause (FP)

In the corpus, three types of pauses are annotated, namely filled pause (FP), silent pause (SP) and silent pause at the end of a phrase/clause/sentence (SP-E). While filled pause should be avoided as far as possible, it does not mean that all silent pauses are negative to your performance. Appropriate pausing can make your speech easier to follow and more natural (which is also known as **chunking**), which should be appreciated. To define an appropriate pause, you should consider i) pause location and ii) pause duration.

For pause location, it means where you put the pause in your speech. Usually, speakers from a higher band can pause their speech in an appropriate space, including the end of a phrase, clause or sentence, whereas speakers from a lower band may pause in the middle of a meaningful phrase.

For pause duration, it means the time you have paused in your speech. Long pause with the duration more than 1.0s should be avoided.

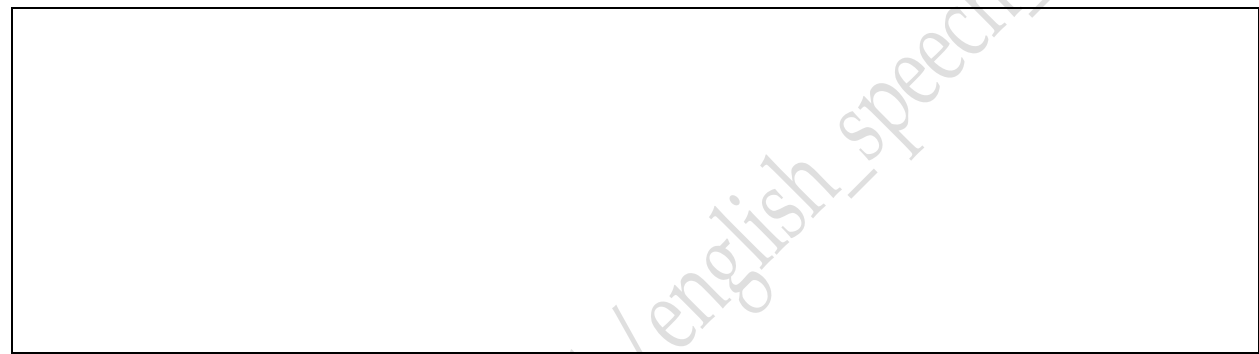
Example:

Band 5.5: And so, they... in the, in grow up, they (SP, 0.70s) they can have a more intalent (SP, 0.34), intalented (SP, 1.75s) achievement.

Band 7.5: So (SP-E, 0.59s), people will think that 'oh, he is doing that, so I can do that as well'.

Activity 7. How do they pause?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Compare the silent pauses and silent pauses at the end of a phrase/clause/sentence made by a speaker from lower band (5.0 – 5.5) and a speaker from higher band (7.0 – 7.5). Can you tell any differences?

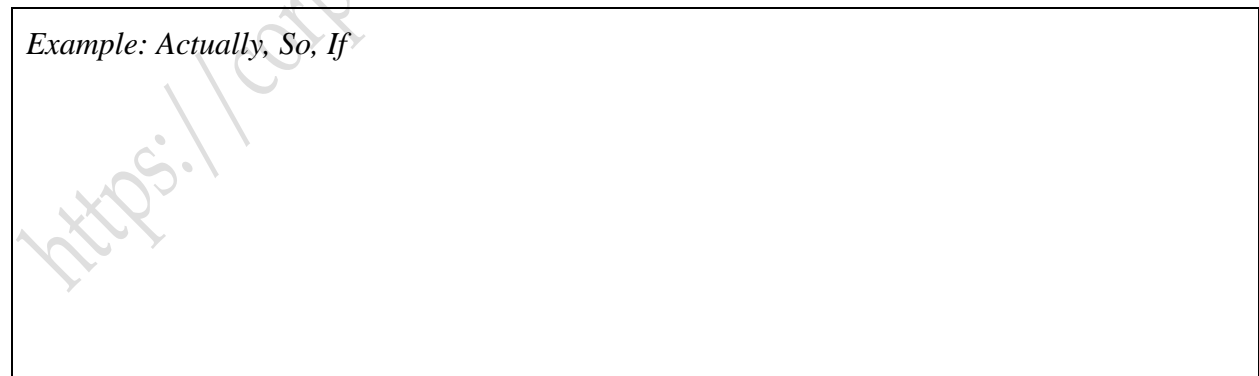


Part IV. How to use discourse markers and connectives?

Activity 8. What are considered as discourse markers and connectives?

Go to the corpus and use the 'Search' function. Select the Band of speakers and 'Fluency and Coherence' as the criteria, then choose 'Discourse markers and Connectives' as Step 1. Take a look at one of the results, can you identify at least three discourse markers and connectives?

Example: Actually, So, If



After learning the ways to demonstrate fluency in terms of speech continuity and speech rate, it is time to tackle the issue of coherence. Appropriate use of connectives and discourse markers can

demonstrate your ability to produce utterances with clear logic. The examiner can also understand your ideas more easily. Such ability is a key to differentiate a Band-6.0 and a Band-7.0 performance.

Discourse markers and Connectives

Order or sequence what we say			
other than	well	firstly	secondly
thirdly	first (of all)	second	third
for a start	on top of that	next	in the end
and then	also	last of all	lastly
a ... b	to begin with	on the one hand	on the other hand
in addition	moreover	what's more	in general
in conclusion	to sum up	in sum	moving on to the next reason
so	the first thing	the next one	subsequently
later	after this	finally	and one more thing
another thing that comes to mind	besides	additionally	another reason for this
at the very beginning	whenever	too	as well
and	both ... and ...	if	so as
although	but	in order that	so that
as if/as though	either ... or	in order to	then
as long as/so long as/as	even if	neither ... nor	unless
as well as	even though	or	whereas
because/because of/cos/cos of/since/as	however	so	while/whilst/when/before/after/whereby

Monitor what we say			
what I mean is	in other words	actually	I mean
as I say	you know	you see	somehow
Response			
absolutely	right	okay	fine
wonderful	OK	wow	(all) right
good	quite	yeah	certainly
great	really	yes	definitely
I see	sure	exactly	no
oh really	oh	that's terrible	of course
Show attitude			
actually	frankly	I think	(I'm) sorry
admittedly	hopefully	if you ask me	sadly
literally	surprisingly	amazingly	honestly
naturally	thankfully	basically	to tell you the truth
no doubt	to be honest	certainly	as a matter of fact
obviously	ideally	clearly	I'm afraid
of course	understandably	confidentially	I must admit
predictably	undoubtedly	definitely	I must say
really	unfortunately	fortunately	essentially
in fact	indeed	seriously	I believe
I guess	I hope	I don't think so	I agree
I don't agree	as far as I know	to a great extent	I should say

I doubt	I suppose	I regret	I admit
that's great/interesting/amazing/awful, etc.			
Soften what we say			
apparently	kind of	perhaps	roughly
arguably	like	presumably	sort of/ kind of
I think	maybe	probably	surely
just	mind (mind you)		
Comparing			
similarly	in the same way	equally	likewise
in a similar fashion	if I compare it to my country		
Contrasting			
instead of	despite	in the opposite way	in contrast
Giving examples			
a great example of this is	for example	for instance	a personal example is
in other words	a striking example of this	a classic example is	a clear example of this can be seen
such as	illustrated by	to be specific	
Stalling*			
let me think about that...	that's difficult/interesting question	I haven't thought of that before...	it's hard to say...
let me see	how can I say	talking about this question	like I said before

as I said before	it's difficult		
Result			
as a result	because of this	therefore	consequently
Generalizing			
broadly speaking	as a rule	on the whole	it is often said that...
in most cases	the vast majority of	a small minority of	
Others			
like	anyway	yippee	yuck

***Stalling means phrases used to allow some thinking time for ideas that you are going to say.**

Activity 9. Identify the discourse markers and connectives

Go to the corpus and use the 'Browse' function. Check the script of any speaker, try to identify the discourse markers and connectives for them.

Example: [Speaker 55](#) (Band 7.0)

As long as he's famous, as he is in everyday life, he definitely has. He's not only he... the normal person, this... As he... If he's at home, it's OK what he's doing. I, I don't, don't care. But, yeah, at the mo, the, the very moment he goes public or is in television or on the newspapers, he definitely has a responsibility because millions of people are watching what he is doing.

Discourse markers and connectives: *As long as, definitely, yeah, as, if, but, or, because*

Activity 10. Produce a response with appropriate length

Prepare a response with appropriate length to one question selected from the [question bank](#). Identify which discourse markers and connectives have been used in your script.

Part: 1 / 2 / 3 (delete as appropriate) Question:
Your response:
Discourse markers and connectives:

Example:

Part: 1 / 2 / 3 Question: <i>Do you think it is important for people to spend time outdoors?</i>
Your response:

I think so, especially, when you stay indoors, your mind will be quite stuck, but when you go outside and then get some fresh air, I think people can get really clear mind and that's really good for people.

Discourse markers and connectives: *I think so, especially, quite, and then, really, when, but*

Follow-up task: Mock test with the corpus

Have a mock test with the videos [here](#). You are recommended to record yourself, either in video or in audio, during the mock test. Evaluate yourself based on the following form:

Key indicators	Occurrences
Repetition	
Self-correction	
Filled pause	
Silent pause	
Silent pause at the end of a phrase/clause/sentence	
Discourse marker and Connective	

How long did you take to deliver your speech? How many syllables/words are there per minute?

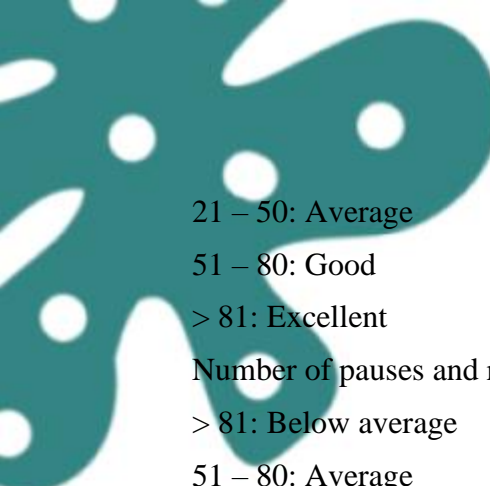
Length:

Speech rate:

Indicators:

Number of discourse markers and connectives, and self-corrections:

≤ 20: Below average



21 – 50: Average

51 – 80: Good

> 81: Excellent

Number of pauses and repetitions:

> 81: Below average

51 – 80: Average

21 – 50: Good

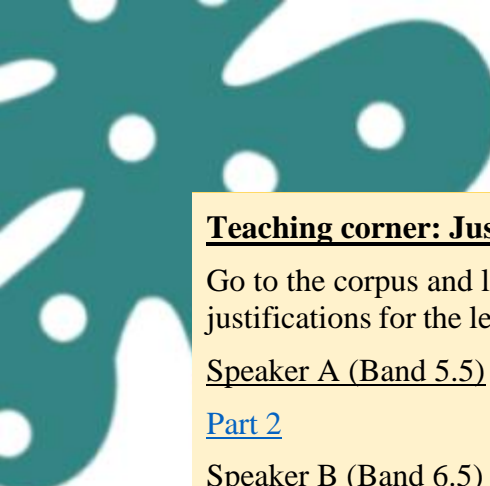
≤ 20: Excellent

Share your performance with other learners and learn from each other at this link.

Activity 11. Self-reflection

Have you ever done any classroom presentation or delivered any free speech? How did you perform on Fluency and Coherence?

If you were given chances to re-do it again, how would you improve your performance with the skills you learnt in this chapter?



Teaching corner: Justify their levels

Go to the corpus and listen to the performances by the two speakers below. Can you give some justifications for the levels they get based on the key indicators of Fluency and Coherence (FC)?

Speaker A (Band 5.5)

[Part 2](#)

Speaker B (Band 6.5)

[Part 2](#)



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