



IELTS SPEAKING GRAMMAR

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

KEITH O'HARE

About the Author

Keith runs [The Keith Speaking Academy](#). He has been working in international education for over 20 years as a teacher, teacher trainer and education manager.

He has helped over 20,000 students prepare for their IELTS Speaking test with his online courses.



INTRODUCTION

Introduction	2
--------------	----------

I. LEARN BASIC ENGLISH

GRAMMAR: BEGINNERS – PART 1

Easy English Grammar	4
VERBS in English	8
ADVERBS in English	13
NOUNS in English	17
ARTICLES in English	22

II. LEARN BASIC ENGLISH

GRAMMAR: BEGINNERS – PART 2

English Grammar: ADJECTIVES	26
PRONOUNS in English	29
PREPOSITIONS in English	33
Basic Grammar: CONJUNCTIONS	39

III. COMPLEX SENTENCES FOR IELTS SPEAKING

Simple and Complex Tenses	43
Complex Tenses in Reported Speech	46
Clauses and Complex Sentences	48
What is a Clause?	50
Clauses and Conjunctions	52
Relative Clauses	54
Adverbial Clauses	57

Introduction

How do you think about English Grammar?

Do you think about complicated rules, confusing ideas, difficult concepts?

If so, you may be thinking about grammar in the wrong way, and so your learning is going to stressful and ineffective.

You probably know that a wide range of grammatical structures is really important if you want to get a band 7 or above in IELTS Speaking.

We can see the **Band descriptors for Grammar** in IELTS Speaking talk about Simple and Complex Structures.

What's more, they say a band 7 student 'uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility'

What you may not sure about is what 'complex grammar' is exactly?
And how do we use it?

Actually, grammar can be fun, if you change how you think about it.

Let me make basic English grammar easy for you.

LEARN BASIC ENGLISH GRAMMAR: BEGINNERS - PART 1

Easy English Grammar

VERBS in English

ADVERBS in English

NOUNS in English

ARTICLES in English

EASY ENGLISH GRAMMAR



I think language is like [music](#).

Imagine **words are like musical notes** and the grammar describes which notes go together, like in English it describes which words go together. As simple as that.

Grammar describes the language, but it is not the language.

It's a way of talking about it.

You may find that you started to get bored with grammar when your teacher introduced lots of complicated names and labels, like the 'present perfect conditional' or 'possessive determiners'. As well as lots of rules followed by lots of exceptions.

And slowly, the word [grammar](#) meant 'headache'!

You see, I think you need to start with **listening** to and **loving** the [music](#), as well as repeating it, but not by first learning the rules about the order of notes.

Likewise with language. When learning English, start by listening to and loving the language, as well as repeating it.

Don't start with the grammar.

As a teenager, I learnt to play the piano by myself. I didn't buy a music book, I just listened to music and tried to imitate it.

After some months, I played something to my friend, who had had music classes.

He said, that's great, you know the major scales, arpeggios and minor blues scales. I had no idea what all that meant, but I could play them.

I was passionate about it and loved it.

In fact, I then became curious about all these names or labels and what they meant. So I learnt them and it helped me.

In conclusion, I found the best way to learn was to combine learning by listening and repeating, with the discovery of some labels and rules.

I have successfully learnt Chinese and Spanish the same way. First by listening, loving and repeating, and then by learning some names, labels and rules.

This is how to make English grammar easy.

I believe the grammar should always come second, as a clarification, rather than a basis for learning.

With this in mind, I have created this guide as a reference.

You can use it as a way to clarify some basic English grammar you may know, and a way to review and deepen your understanding.

In this guide, I will look at the following **8 most important parts of speech** you should know as a part of basic English grammar for beginners.

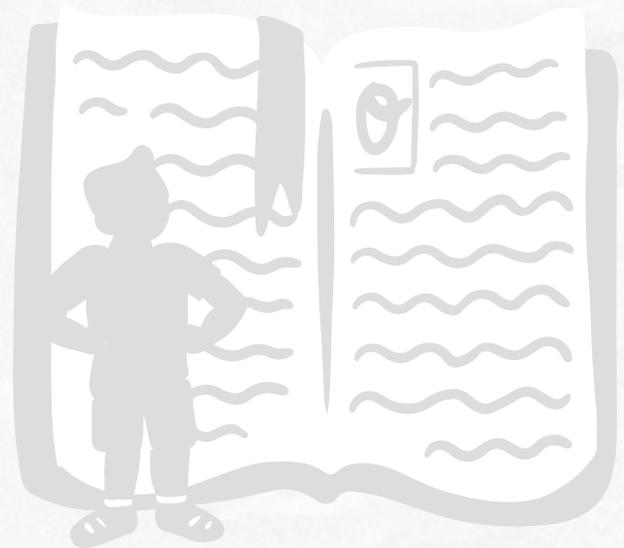
Here in Part 1, we will look at the following:

1. Verbs
2. Adverbs
3. Nouns
4. Articles

In Part 2, we will look at the following:

1. Adjectives
2. Pronouns
3. Prepositions
4. Conjunctions

VERBS IN ENGLISH



1) INFINITIVES

Verbs are doing words. They describe actions and states. For example,

- **drive, cook , read**

We sometimes put 'to' before a verb, and this is called the '**infinitive**'. It's just a label to help you recognise it is a verb.

- **To drive, To cook , To read**

Verbs can exist in different tenses. In the **past**, the **present** and the **future**.

2) PRESENT TENSE

Let's look at examples in the present simple tense:

Describing a present habit (present simple)

- **I usually cook on Saturdays**
- **I drive to work everyday**

Notice in the present simple tense we must add an S or ES to the verb after **he, she and it**

He, she and it are sometimes called 'the third person'.

Think of it like I am first, you are second and she is third!

- **He cookS /kʊks/**
- **She driveS /draɪvz/**

3) PAST TENSE

In the past tenses, verbs can be **regular** or **irregular**.

Regular verbs are put into the simple past tense by adding ED

- **I cookED yesterday /kʊkt/**
- **I washED my face /wɒʃd/**
- **I wantED to go /wɒntɪd/**

As for **irregular verbs**, there are about 200 of them in English, but here are 35 of the most important ones for beginners.

Verb (Infinitive)	Past participle	Verb (Infinitive)	Past participle
Do	Did	Buy	Bought
Make	Made	Spend	Spent
Go	Went	Choose	Chose
Come	Came	Wear	Wore
Get	Got	Eat	Ate
Take	Took	Drink	Drank
Find	Found	Drive	Drove
Give	Gave		
Put	Put	Sit	Sat
Bring	Brought	Stand	Stood
		See	Saw
Say	Said	Read	Read
Tell	Told	Write	Wrote
Speak	Spoke	Draw	Drew
Mean	Meant	Cut	Cut
Know	Knew		
Hear	Heard		
Think	Thought		
Feel	Felt		
Understand	Understood		

4) VERBS as NOUNS

Finally, it is useful to know that verbs can become nouns. When we add 'ing' to a verb, often known as 'the gerund', it can become a noun.

For example,

- **Driving is fun**
- **Cooking is relaxing**

ADVERBS IN ENGLISH

ADV



Adverbs are used with verbs to say how, when and where you do something.

1) Adverbs of Manner: HOW

- **I drive quickly**

‘**Quickly**’ (adverb) tells you how I **drive** (verb)

1. We make an adverb by adding ‘ly’ to an adjective

Safe + ly = Safely
ADJECTIVE + LY = ADVERB

2. Adverbs come after the verb. For example,

I drive quickly
SUBJECT + VERB + ADVERB

3. If the verb has an object, then the adverb comes after the object

I read books slowly
SUBJECT + VERB + OBJECT + ADVERB

There are some **irregular adverbs**, but not many. For these adverbs, we do not add 'ly' to the adjective.

The common ones for basic English grammar are the following

Adjective	Adverb
Good	Well
Fast	Fast
Hard	Hard
Wrong	Wrong
Early	Early

2) Adverbs of Time and Frequency: WHEN

Adverbs can also describe **when** and **how often** you do something. For example,

- **I always drive to work**

We call these adverbs frequency adverbs and the most common ones you need to basic English grammar are probably,

- **Always**
- **Usually**
- **Normally**
- **Often**
- **Sometimes**
- **Rarely**
- **Never**

The position of these adverbs can change in spoken English, but normally they go between the subject and the verb.

I always drive to work
SUBJECT + ADV + VERB

In addition to individual words, we also have phrases which act as adverbs, these are commonly called **adverbials**.

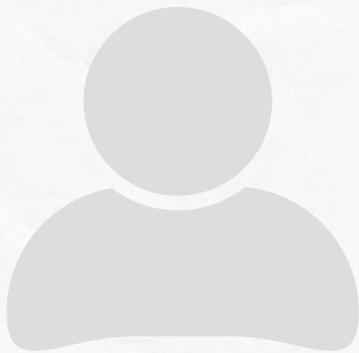
Some adverbials of frequency you may see or hear as a beginner are the following

- **Now and again**
- **From time to time**
- **Once in a blue moon**

Adverbials can go at the beginning or at the end of a sentence.

- **Once in a blue moon, I drive my wife's car**
- **I drive my wife's car once in a blue moon**

NOUNS IN ENGLISH



Nouns can represent things, people, or places.

Here are some examples,

THINGS:

- **Pen, car, day**

PEOPLE:

- **Friend, teacher, colleague**

PLACES:

- **Classroom, city, kitchen**

When we actually use the name of something, these are known as **proper nouns and are spelled with a capital letter.**

Common Noun	Proper Noun
A friend	Jack
A city	Manchester
A month	July

1) SINGULAR / PLURAL of NOUNS

Nouns can be either singular (just one) or plural (more than one). To make a noun into a plural we add S or ES

For example

Singular	Plural	Pronunciation
Book	Books	/bʊks/
Car	Cars	/kɑːz/
Box	Boxes	/bɒksɪz/

2) COUNTABLE / UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

It is possible to count most things, and if we can, then we can use those nouns in the plural. For example, cars, **books** and boxes.

However, there are certain nouns that we cannot count, and so we can never use the plural.

Some are obvious like liquids (water, coffee, oil), these are difficult to count, and so are rarely put in the plural and don't take an article (a / an).

If we do count them, then the meaning changes a little.

So, for example, when we say ‘I want two coffees’, we are referring to cups of coffee, not coffee the liquid.

Others are less obvious like powder (rain, pepper, salt), and grammatically we cannot put these in the plural.

Likewise, there are other abstract words that are ‘grammatically’ uncountable and so we don’t use the plural or an article (a / an).

However, we can usually make them countable by adding a unit of measure. Here are some common examples below of uncountable nouns made countable.

Uncountable Nouns	Countable Nouns
water	A glass of water
coffee	A cup of coffee
sugar	A teaspoon of sugar
rice	A grain of rice / A bol of rice
furniture	A piece of furniture
information	A piece of information
news	A piece of news
advice	A piece of advice

3) NOUN PHRASES

Nouns are not only individual words. They can also be a group of words. In this case, it is known as a noun phrase.

For example,

The pen in my hand **is** **black**
NOUN PHRASE **+ VERB +** **ADJECTIVE**

The woman with blond hair and glasses **is** **from London**
NOUN PHRASE **+ VERB +** **ADJECTIVE**

It is useful to be aware of these, especially when reading quickly or listening to a long passage, as it can help you identify the different building blocks of a sentence. If you only listen to or look at, individual words, this will really slow you down.

ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

A, AN

THE



Nouns can have an article before them, and this help you make it clear if you are talking about a general noun or a specific one.

1) A / AN

We use the indefinite article A or AN when we are talking about something generally. So, if you don't know which one I mean, I will use A or AN

- **I saw a cat in your garden.** (You don't know which cat I mean)
- **I'd like an apple, please.** (I am not asking for a specific one, any apple will do)

As you can see, when a noun begins with a vowel, we use AN.

Notice that with plurals, we don't use A / AN

- **I love dogs**

In addition, with uncountable nouns, we don't use A / AN

- **I'm tired, I need coffee**

2) THE

We use the definite article THE when we are talking about something specific. So if you know which one I mean – I will use THE

- **Can you pass me the blue pen?** (You know which pen I mean)
- **I am going to the bank** (You know which bank I mean)

3) THIS / THAT

In addition, to indicate if something is near or far, either in distance or time, we can use THIS / THAT.

- **This book is better than that one.**

THIS gives the feeling that something is **near**, and THAT gives the feeling it is **far away**. Here is an example with distance in time. Here is an example with distance in time.

- **This story I am going to tell you is interesting**
- **That story you told me yesterday was interesting**

We can also use the plurals as below

Singular	Plural
This	These
That	Those

LEARN BASIC ENGLISH GRAMMAR: BEGINNERS - PART 2

English Grammar: ADJECTIVES
PRONOUNS in English
PREPOSITIONS in English
Basic Grammar: CONJUNCTIONS

ENGLISH GRAMMAR: ADJECTIVES



Let's look now at adjectives.

Basically, adjectives describe nouns. Simple as that. For example,

- **An interesting book**
- **A delicious chocolate**
- **A refreshing drink**

The adjective comes before the noun

A refreshing drink
ARTICLE + ADJECTIVE + NOUN

Adjectives are so useful in [IELTS Speaking](#) because they enrich your language and make your descriptions much more interesting.

When learning adjectives I strongly recommend you also learn the [antonyms](#), if possible. An [antonym](#) is a word with the opposite meaning.

For example, the antonym of **big** is **small**.

Antonyms of adjectives will help build up your range of [vocabulary](#) very quickly.

What I do is, I make a note of the new adjective and antonym and try to make simple phrases using them, speaking them out loud. I make phrases that are true for me, so they are easier to remember.

For example,

- **I have a big kitchen in a small flat!**

It's true, I wish I could buy a bigger flat!

Now, another important thing to know about adjectives, is that we can use adverbs to describe adjectives; adverbs such as,

- **Really**
- **Absolutely**
- **Totally**
- **Completely**

This is a really exciting book

ADVERB + ADJECTIVE + NOUN

That was an absolutely delicious piece of chocolate

ADVERB + ADJECTIVE + NOUN

PRONOUNS IN ENGLISH



PRON



As you might be able to guess, pronouns replace nouns (people, places, things) or a noun phrase.

We use them in order to avoid too much repetition. For example, the first two sentences below are fine, but the repetition of ‘your car’ doesn’t sound very natural. It would be better to replace it with ‘it’

- **Your car is lovely. She likes your car.**
- **Your car is lovely. She likes it.**

At the same time, as you can see, this use of pronouns enables us to reference things, places, or people we have previously mentioned.

1) SUBJECT PRONOUNS

A subject pronoun replaces a noun that is the subject of a phrase. A ‘subject’ of a phrase is just the person (place or thing) doing something.

In the example, below, ‘Jack’ is the subject (who is eating) and is replaced by ‘he’.

- **Jack ate the chocolate**
- **HE ate the chocolate**

Here is a list of the subject pronouns

- I
- YOU
- HE / SHE / IT
- YOU (plural)
- WE
- THEY

2) OBJECT PRONOUNS

An object pronoun replaces a noun that is the object of a phrase. An 'object' of a phrase is just the person (place or thing) that is the object of the action.

Look at this example,

- **Anny likes Keith**

Here, 'Keith' is the object (who is liked by Anny) and we can replace 'Keith' with the object pronoun 'him'.

- **Anny likes HIM**

Here is a list of the object pronouns

- ME
- YOU
- HIM / HER / IT
- US
- YOU
- THEM

3) POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

A possessive pronoun replaces a noun that belongs to someone, (the possessive adjective + noun). For example,

This is my hat
POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVE + NOUN

In the example below, 'my hat' is the noun (that belongs to me) and in the second sentence is replaced by 'mine' (The possessive pronoun).

- **I think this is my hat. Yes, I am sure it's mine!**

Here are the possessive pronouns

- MINE
- YOURS
- HIS
- HERS
- OURS
- THEIRS

NOTICE: When names are used to describe possession, we use an apostrophe before the 's'.

For example,

- **That is Keith's hat.**

However, possessive pronouns **do not** have an apostrophe before the 's'. For example, we do not say 'It's your's hat'. No, we say 'it's YOUR hat'.

PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH

At On In

Let's move on and look at prepositions in English. This is one of the most important aspects of basic English grammar for beginners.

Since prepositions have many functions, and also often correspond to several different prepositions in other languages, I think the best approach here is to go step by step.

Here, we will look at 3 different prepositions that are actually also related.

Try to avoid translating prepositions, this often leads to mistakes.

Instead, I think it's also useful to get the 'feeling' of how we use prepositions in English.

There is a very useful book for advanced learners that looks at this 'feeling' of prepositions in more detail. You can get a feel for this (ha ha 😊) by reading an excerpt via the link below

<https://jdanielauthor.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Logic-of-English-Prepositions-Newsletter-Sample.pdf>

Here, I will look at the following 3 prepositions and what is the general feeling they create when we use them in English.

- **At**
- **On**
- **In**

1) How to use the Preposition AT

1. 'AT' used to give a feeling of a **specific point** or **time**

Examples:

- **I live at 221 Baker Street**
- **I get up at 6 o'clock**

2. 'AT' used to give a feeling of a **Space** or **Bubble**

If I say, 'I am at home', then we don't know exactly where I am in the house. I might be in the kitchen or in the bathroom. So we use AT to give an idea of being in a wider space or you can also imagine the idea of being in a bubble. The house being the bubble.

See similar examples below.

- **I am at home**
- **I am at work**
- **She is at the beach**
- **We are at the cinema**
- **He is at the shops**

2) How to use the Preposition ON

1. ON used to give a feeling of **touching a surface**

Examples:

- **The cup is on the table**
- **The picture is on the wall**
- **I live on Baker Street**

In the last example, we have the idea of the whole street being a surface and you live on one part of that surface.

2. ON used to give a feeling of being **on a platform**

Examples:

- **I'm on the Internet**
- **She's on the phone**
- **I'm on Facebook**
- **I saw a film on Netflix**

3. ON used to give a feeling of being **on a platform time**

We use ON with days of the week.

If you can imagine a day being elevated (on a platform) higher than other days of the week, then this is one way to remember the use of ON for days.

Examples:

- **I always go swimming on Mondays**
- **He came on Tuesday**
- **I have an appointment on the 5th Jan**

3) How to use the Preposition IN

1. 'IN' used to give a feeling of being **contained** in a **place**

Examples:

- **The present was in a box**
- **I live in Manchester**
- **Get in the car!**

If I say, 'I live in Spain' we can imagine Spain as the container and I am inside that container. Likewise with a city or even a neighbourhood.

2. 'IN' used to give a feeling of being **contained** in **time**

Example:

- **I will visit you in July**

In the example above, it helps to imagine the month as containing lots of days, and I will visit you on one of those days but I don't say which one.

The same idea can apply with seasons and years.

Examples:

- **I will go in summer**
- **I went there in 2021**

There is a connection between these 3 prepositions.

If you look at the examples below, you can see how the time or distance gets bigger and bigger, as we move from AT to ON and then to IN.

- **At 6 o'clock, on Monday, in July**
- **At 221 Baker Street, on Baker Street, in London**

If it helps, you can also imagine this graphically like this.



BASIC GRAMMAR: CONJUNCTIONS



Conjunctions are simple words that join two words, phrases or clauses.

They help show the relationship between the two.

Most Common Spoken Conjunctions

- | | |
|-------|--------------|
| • and | • before |
| • or | • after |
| • but | • because |
| • so | • as soon as |

In the example below, we have two sentences, and we can join them with a conjunction to make our English flow more naturally.

- **He eats a lot. He is fat.**

Examples with conjunctions

- **He eats a lot so he is fat**
- **He eats a lot because he is fat**
- **He eats a lot and he is fat**

In [IELTS Speaking](#) conjunctions are invaluable because they are a simple way to create complex sentences.

We can build one clause on top of another and connect them with conjunctions. You should also know that the most commonly used conjunctions are the simple ones mentioned above.

COMPLEX SENTENCES FOR IELTS SPEAKING

Simple and Complex Tenses
Complex Tenses in Reported Speech
Clauses and Complex Sentences
What is a Clause?
Clauses and Conjunctions
Relative Clauses
Adverbial Clauses

How do you create complex sentences in [IELTS Speaking](#)?

You probably know that a wide range of grammatical structures is really important if you want to get a band 7 or above in IELTS Speaking.

We can see the [band descriptors](#) for Grammar in IELTS Speaking talk about Simple and Complex Structures.

What's more, they say a band 7 student 'uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility'

What you may not sure about is what 'complex grammar' is exactly?
And how do we use it?

Let's find out in the next part of this guide.

SIMPLE AND COMPLEX TENSES



Complex grammar can include many things, and in this guide, I am going to look at 2 main areas, to give you a flavour of what it can include.

Learn more complex grammar with my complete preparation course: [IELTS Speaking Success - Get a Band 7+ GOLD](#)



1) SIMPLE TENSES

Let's look first at tenses. The following are generally seen as **simple tenses**

Present Simple (facts, regular activities)	Present Continuous (activity now)
I work from home I play football every Thursday	I am drinking tea now

Past Simple (activity finished in past)	Past Continuous
I went to the park yesterday	I was reading a book when the phone rang

Future Simple (decisions, predictions, promises)

I **will call** you tomorrow
Tom **won't** come, he hates parties

2) COMPLEX TENSES

The following are generally seen as being more **complex tenses**

Present Perfect (unfinished past activity, experiences)

I **have lived** here for 10 years
I **have** never **seen** the Queen

Present Perfect Continuous (unfinished past activity)

I **have been living** here for 10 years

Past Perfect (clarifying an event before moment in past)

I **had** already **booked** the tickets before I arrived at the station

Past Perfect Continuous (continuous activity before moment in past)

I went to see the doctor because I **had been having** knee pains

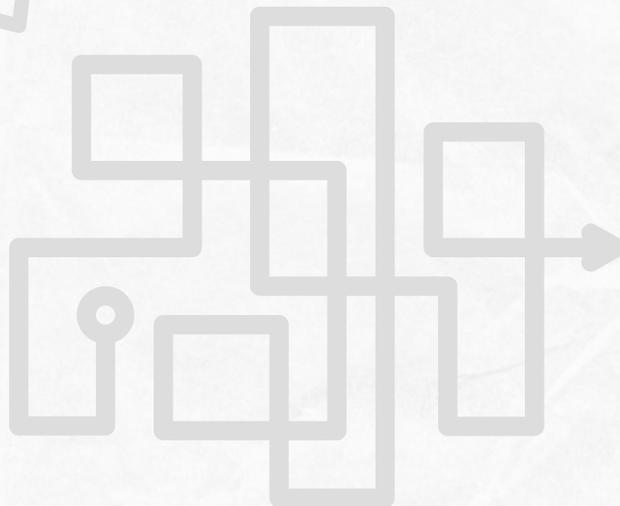
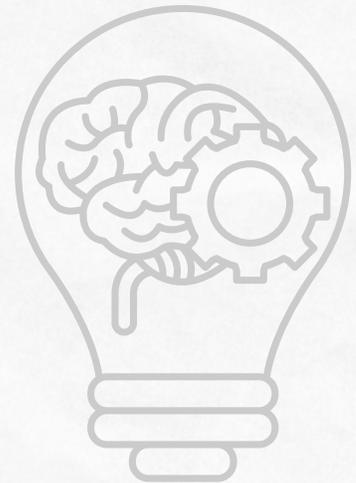
2nd Conditional (unreal situation)

If I **had** more money, I **would buy** a bigger house

3rd Conditional (unreal past situation)

If I **had known**, I would **have gone**

COMPLEX TENSES IN REPORTED SPEECH



Learn more about using grammar in different part of the FLUENT Grammar for IELTS Speaking



Another example of complex grammar is when we use some of the above tenses in reported speech.

Imagine something happened to you and you are telling the story of that event in [IELTS Speaking Part 2](#).

For example, someone says,

- **“I enjoyed the food but I won’t go back to that restaurant”**

When telling the story in [Part 2](#), you should use reported speech, and then the above becomes,

- **“He said he had enjoyed the food, but that he wouldn’t go to that restaurant again.”**

However, complexity does lie just in **one** tense.

It lies across whole sentences and whole answers.

To see how this works, let’s look next at the simple secret to building complex structures – that is “Clauses”

CLAUSES AND COMPLEX SENTENCES





You probably know about ‘sentences’, as these are the basic building blocks of writing.

But we don’t always speak in sentences.

Really, it’s true!

Take this example of a written sentence about the city where I live,

- **I visited Santander which is not a very pretty city due to a fire that destroyed it in 1941.**

When we speak we tend to break our speech into smaller units that are easier to use and remember. These smaller units of speech are called **clauses**.

The above in spoken English would look like this,

- **“I visited Santander**
- **It’s not a very pretty city**
- **Because there was a fire**
- **A fire that destroyed it in 1941”**

A clause is the basic building block of speaking. This is the secret to building complex sentences in [IELTS Speaking](#).

All you have to do is put the blocks together and build!

WHAT IS A CLAUSE?



A clause usually has a **subject** (sometimes called a noun phrase) and a **verb phrase** (sometimes called a predicate) that tells us about the subject.

For example,

I live in Spain
I (subject) + live in Spain (verb phrase)

We can build complex structures by building 2, 3 or more clauses.

The thing is in order to build complex sentences in IELTS Speaking, don't focus on perfect writing and punctuation. Instead, focus on building up clauses, using perfect pauses and intonation patterns.

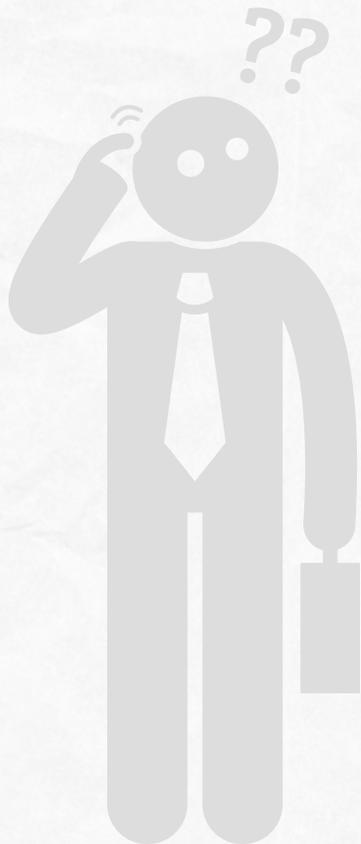
How do we do that?

Let me show you some very specific examples, so it's crystal clear.

CLAUSES AND CONJUNCTIONS



RELATIVE CLAUSES



? WHO!
WHEN



Next, let's take examples of **describing** a clause with adjective clauses or relative clauses. In this case, we would use words like

- who
- which
- that
- where
- when
- whose

Clause 1	+	who		+	Clause 2
		which			
		that			
		where			
		when			
		whose			

For example, we can say,

- **I live in Spain** which is a beautiful country
- **I live in a city** where there is not too much traffic
- **I work for a woman** who is very friendly

Now you can see how we can start to build blocks. Here are some more examples, as we build more complex sentences.

- **I live in Spain**
- **which is a pretty big country**
- **and I like it very much.**

- **I live in Spain,**
- **which is a pretty big country,**
- **and I like it very much,**
- **although the weather is a bit too hot.**

ADVERBIAL CLAUSES

ADV



Again, you can now you can see how we can start to build more complex sentences in IELTS Speaking.

- **I live in Spain**
- **because the food is great,**
- **although I think they eat too much fish**

- **I work as a teacher**
- **because I love showing people new things,**
- **although I do find the long hours are tiring**

- **I live in Spain,**
- **which is a pretty big country,**
- **because the food is great.**

- **I live in Spain,**
- **which is a pretty big country,**
- **because the food is great,**
- **although I think they eat too much fish.**

In this last example, you can see how we can notably build up many clauses, we can also use more complex tenses in these clauses.

- **I have been living in Spain for 10 years,**
- **which is quite a long time actually**
- **partly because the food is great,**
- **although I think they eat too much fish.**

All of this helps create more complex sentences in your IELTS Speaking, and so helping you get a [band 7 or above](#).

The key, is to practice. So, now go back and practice making some complex phrases to describe you, your job, your family or your home.

Think about mixing different tenses in your clauses.



LEARNING *English*

- Listen to it
- Love it
- Repeat it
- Check the Grammar
- Practice



Find out more about my work at

WWW.KEITHSPEAKINGACADEMY.COM

