

FREE IELTS STUDY PDF

ACADEMIC & GENERAL TRAINING

IELTS Speaking Topics with Answers PDF

40 Part 1 topics, 30 Part 2 cue cards and 60 Part 3 discussion questions, each with a natural model answer you can learn from.

What's inside

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SECTION 1

How the Speaking test works

The Speaking test lasts 11 to 14 minutes. It is a face-to-face conversation with a certified examiner, and it is recorded. The format is the same for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training.

Part	Time	What happens
Part 1: Introduction and interview	4 to 5 minutes	The examiner checks your identity, then asks general questions about familiar topics such as home, family, work, studies and interests.
Part 2: Long turn	3 to 4 minutes	You get a cue card, 1 minute to prepare, and a pencil and paper for notes. You then speak for up to 2 minutes, and the examiner stops you when time is up.
Part 3: Discussion	4 to 5 minutes	You discuss wider issues linked to the Part 2 topic, in a more general and abstract way.

How you are marked

Your band score is based on four criteria, each with equal weight.

Criterion	What the examiner listens for
Fluency and coherence	Speaking at a natural pace, with ideas that connect clearly.
Lexical resource	Using a range of vocabulary accurately, including less common words.
Grammatical range and accuracy	Using a mix of simple and complex sentences with few errors.
Pronunciation	Being easy to understand, with natural stress and intonation.

Tip

In Part 1, answer the question directly, then add one reason or example. Two or three sentences is usually enough.

Common mistake

Reciting memorised answers. Examiners are trained to notice them, and they rarely fit the exact question asked.

How to use this PDF

Read a question, answer it out loud in your own words, then compare with the model answer. Note one phrase you could borrow. Do not learn the answers by heart.

SECTION 2

Part 1 questions with answers

40 common Part 1 topics with 120 questions. Use the model answers to study structure and natural phrasing, then answer each question in your own words.

1. Work or studies

Do you work or are you a student?

I'm a student at the moment. I'm in the final year of a commerce degree, and I also help out at my uncle's shop at weekends, which gives me a bit of practical experience.

Why did you choose that subject?

Mainly because I've always liked numbers and planning. My father runs a small business, so I grew up hearing about sales and costs, and it felt like a natural choice.

What do you find difficult about it?

Honestly, the theory papers. Practical work comes easily to me, but long readings on economic history take real effort to get through.

2. Your hometown

Where is your hometown?

I'm from Vadodara, a mid-sized city in Gujarat. It's about two hours from Ahmedabad by road.

What do you like most about it?

I'd say the pace of life. It's big enough to have good colleges and hospitals, but it's never as rushed or crowded as the larger cities.

How has your hometown changed in recent years?

It's grown a lot. There are new flyovers and shopping centres, and many of the old open grounds have been replaced by apartments, which I find a little sad.

3. Free time

What do you usually do in your free time?

I play badminton with friends most evenings, and on Sundays I try to read for an hour or two without my phone nearby.

Do you prefer spending free time alone or with others?

It depends on my mood. After a long week I like company, but I also need some quiet time alone to recharge.

Has the way you spend free time changed since childhood?

Definitely. As a child I spent hours playing cricket outside. These days I spend far more time on screens, which I'm trying to cut down.

4. Technology

How often do you use your phone?

Probably more than I should. I use it for classes, messages and banking, so it's in my hand for several hours a day.

Which app do you find most useful?

A maps app, without a doubt. I'm not great with directions, and it saves me from getting lost almost every week.

Do you think people rely too much on technology?

To some extent, yes. It's convenient, but many people can't remember a phone number or do simple sums without a device any more.

5. Food

What kind of food do you like?

I love home-cooked Gujarati food, especially dal, rice and fresh rotis. Simple meals like that are my favourite.

Do you cook at home?

A little. I can make tea, eggs and a basic vegetable dish, and I'm learning a few more recipes from my mother.

Is eating out popular where you live?

Very popular, especially at weekends. Street food stalls are busy every evening, and families often eat out on Sundays.

6. Travel

Do you like travelling?

Yes, I really enjoy it, although I don't get to travel as often as I'd like because of my studies.

Do you prefer travelling by train or by bus?

By train, for longer trips. It's more comfortable, I can walk around, and the views are usually better.

Where would you like to travel in the future?

I'd love to visit Japan. I'm curious about how a country can be so modern and still keep its traditions so strong.

7. Your home

Do you live in a house or a flat?

I live in a three-bedroom flat with my parents and younger brother in Vadodara. It's on the fourth floor of a fairly quiet building, so we get a lovely breeze in the evenings, which is a real blessing during summer.

What is your favourite room in your home?

I'd say it's our balcony, even though it's technically not a room. I've put a small chair and a few potted plants there, and it's where I usually sit with a cup of tea when I want some peace and quiet.

Would you like to move to a different home in the future?

Yes, eventually I would. Once I'm financially settled, I'd love a home with a bit more space, ideally with a small garden. That said, I'd probably want to stay in the same city, because I'm quite attached to it.

8. Family

How many people are there in your family?

There are four of us at home: my parents, my younger brother and me. But to be honest, if you count my grandparents, uncles and cousins who live nearby, it feels much bigger, because we meet up almost every weekend.

Who are you closest to in your family?

I'm probably closest to my mother. She's incredibly patient and practical, so whenever I'm stressed about exams or making a decision, she's the first person I talk to. She rarely tells me what to do, but she helps me think clearly.

Do you spend a lot of time with your family?

Not as much as I'd like these days, since my college and part-time work keep me busy. Still, we make a point of having dinner together every night, and that's when we catch up on everyone's day.

9. Friends

Do you have a lot of friends?

I wouldn't say a lot. I've got a wide circle of acquaintances from college, but only three or four really close friends. Most of them I've known since school, so we share a lot of history and can be completely ourselves together.

What do you usually do with your friends?

Mostly we just hang out at someone's house or grab a snack at a roadside stall near our college. Occasionally we go for a long drive on the highway in the evening, which is a nice way to unwind after a hectic week.

Is it easy to make new friends as an adult?

Honestly, I think it gets harder. At school you're with the same people all day, so friendships happen naturally. Now everyone's juggling work and studies, so you really have to make an effort to keep in touch and build trust.

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10. Weather and seasons

What's the weather like where you live?

It's mostly hot, to be honest. Vadodara has scorching summers when temperatures can go well above forty degrees, then a fairly heavy monsoon. The winters are short but pleasant, with cool mornings and warm, sunny afternoons.

Which season do you like the most?

I'd definitely say winter. The air feels fresh, you can actually enjoy being outdoors, and it's also the season for some delicious seasonal food. It's the only time of year I don't mind waking up early.

Does the weather affect your mood?

Yes, quite a lot. During the peak of summer I tend to feel sluggish and a bit irritable, especially in the afternoons. Whereas on a cool, cloudy day I feel much more energetic and productive.

11. Music

What kind of music do you like?

I have quite an eclectic taste, really. I enjoy old Hindi film songs, especially when I'm relaxing, but I also listen to soft acoustic music while studying because it helps me concentrate without being distracting.

How often do you listen to music?

Pretty much every day. I usually put my earphones in while commuting to college, and I often have something playing in the background at home. I'd say music is a big part of how I switch off.

Did you learn to play a musical instrument as a child?

I did take tabla lessons for a couple of years when I was around ten. Unfortunately, I gave up once school got more demanding, which I regret now. I'd love to pick it up again someday.

12. Reading

Do you enjoy reading?

Yes, I do, although I don't read as much as I used to. I'm particularly fond of biographies and books about business, partly because they're linked to my commerce studies and partly because real stories inspire me.

Do you prefer paper books or e-books?

I'd say I prefer paper books. There's something satisfying about turning the pages and seeing your progress. That said, I read e-books on my phone when I'm travelling, simply because it's more convenient.

Did you read a lot when you were a child?

Absolutely. My grandfather used to bring me comic books and illustrated folk tales every week, and I'd finish them in a day. I think that habit really helped improve my vocabulary early on.

13. Films and TV

What kind of films do you like watching?

I mostly enjoy light-hearted comedies and family dramas. After a long day, I want something that makes me laugh rather than something intense. Occasionally I'll watch a thriller with friends, but it's not really my first choice.

Do you prefer watching films at home or in a cinema?

It depends on the film. For big action films, the cinema experience is unbeatable because of the huge screen and sound. But for most things I'd rather watch at home, where I can pause it and get comfortable.

Do you watch more TV now than when you were younger?

Actually, I watch less traditional TV now. When I was a kid, the whole family watched evening shows together. These days I mostly stream shows on my laptop, and only when I've got some free time.

14. Sport and exercise

Do you play any sports?

I play cricket with friends on Sunday mornings, though it's very casual. We just play in a nearby ground for a couple of hours. I'm not particularly skilled, but I really enjoy the team spirit and the friendly banter.

How do you usually keep fit?

Mainly by walking and doing some basic exercises at home. I try to go for a brisk walk in the evening for about thirty minutes. It's simple, but it keeps me active and also clears my head after studying.

Was sport an important part of your school life?

Not really, to be honest. Our school focused heavily on academics, so we only had one sports period a week. I wish there'd been more, because I think regular physical activity would have helped with stress.

15. Shopping

Do you enjoy shopping?

It depends on what I'm buying. I quite like browsing for books or gadgets, but shopping for groceries or household items feels like a chore. I usually try to get it done as quickly as possible.

Where do you usually go shopping?

For everyday things, I go to the local market near my home, because the shopkeepers know us and the produce is fresh. For clothes, I sometimes visit a large mall in the city, especially during festival sales.

Do you prefer shopping alone or with others?

I'd say alone, mostly. When I'm by myself, I can take my time and stick to my list. Shopping with friends is more fun, but I invariably end up buying things I don't actually need.

16. Clothes and fashion

What kind of clothes do you usually wear?

On a normal day, I wear casual clothes like jeans and a cotton shirt, since they're comfortable in the heat. For family functions or festivals, though, I prefer traditional outfits, which I think look much more elegant.

Is fashion important to you?

Not hugely. I like to look neat and presentable, but I don't follow trends closely. I'd rather spend money on a few good-quality pieces that last than keep buying whatever's fashionable at the moment.

Have clothing styles changed in your city in recent years?

Yes, quite noticeably. Young people now mix traditional and western styles a lot, for example wearing a kurta with jeans. Older generations still prefer purely traditional clothing, but even they've become more relaxed about it.

17. Mornings

Are you a morning person?

Not naturally, I'm afraid. I find it hard to get out of bed, especially in winter. But once I've had a cup of tea and a quick shower, I feel alert and actually quite productive.

What do you usually do in the morning?

I usually wake up around seven, have breakfast with my family, and then quickly review my notes before heading to college. On days when I have more time, I try to fit in a short walk as well.

Has your morning routine changed since you were a child?

Definitely. As a child, my mother would wake me up and practically get me ready for school. Now I'm responsible for my own schedule, so I've had to become much more disciplined, although I still occasionally hit snooze.

18. Weekends

What do you usually do at weekends?

Saturdays are usually for catching up on assignments and running errands. Sundays are more relaxed, so I play cricket in the morning and spend the afternoon with family, often visiting my grandparents for lunch.

Do you prefer busy or relaxing weekends?

I'd say a mix of both. If I spend the whole weekend doing nothing, I feel a bit guilty by Monday. But if it's packed with plans, I don't feel rested. A balance works best for me.

Are your weekends different now compared to a few years ago?

Yes, they are. A few years ago, weekends were all about playing and watching TV. Now I often use them to catch up on studies or work, so they feel less carefree, but more purposeful.

19. Festivals

What is the most important festival in your area?

In Gujarat, it's probably Navratri. For nine nights, people gather in open grounds to perform garba, a traditional folk dance. The atmosphere is electric, and the whole city seems to stay awake until the early hours.

How do you usually celebrate festivals?

Mostly with family and close friends. We clean and decorate the house, prepare traditional sweets, and visit relatives. During Diwali, for example, we light oil lamps and exchange gifts, which is my favourite part.

Have festival celebrations changed since you were a child?

In some ways, yes. Celebrations have become more commercial, with more emphasis on shopping and decorations. Also, people now share everything online. But the core of it, spending time with loved ones, hasn't really changed.

20. Neighbours

Do you know your neighbours well?

Yes, fairly well. We've lived in the same building for over ten years, so we know most families on our floor. We often exchange sweets during festivals and help each other out when someone's away.

How do neighbours help each other where you live?

In lots of small ways, really. People keep spare keys for each other, collect deliveries, or check on elderly residents. When my grandmother was unwell, our neighbours regularly brought food, which meant a lot to us.

Do you think neighbours are less close these days?

I'd say so, especially in big cities. People are busier and often move more frequently, so they don't get the chance to build relationships. In my area, though, there's still a strong sense of community.

21. Noise

Is the area where you live noisy?

It's moderately noisy. We're not right on a main road, but you can still hear traffic and vehicle horns during rush hour. Late at night it's fairly calm, which I'm grateful for.



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What kinds of noise bother you the most?

Constant honking really gets on my nerves. It's so unnecessary most of the time. Loud construction work early in the morning is another one, especially when I'm trying to study or sleep in.

Do you prefer a quiet place to study?

Definitely. I find it very hard to concentrate with background chatter, so I usually study in my room with the door closed. If it's too noisy at home, I go to the college library instead.

22. Parks and nature

Are there any parks near your home?

Yes, there's a small neighbourhood park just a few minutes' walk away. It has a jogging track, some benches and a play area for children. It's quite well maintained and gets busy in the evenings.

How often do you spend time in nature?

Not as often as I'd like. I go to the local park for walks most evenings, but proper nature trips, like visiting hills or forests, happen maybe twice a year when we plan a family outing.

Did you spend more time outdoors as a child?

Much more, actually. I used to play outside with neighbourhood kids until it got dark. These days, studies and screens take up most of my time, which is a shame, because being outdoors always lifts my mood.

23. Animals and pets

Do you have a pet?

No, I don't at the moment. Our flat isn't really big enough, and everyone's out for most of the day. But I'd love to have a dog in the future, once I have a home with some outdoor space.

What animals are common in your city?

You'll see a lot of stray dogs and cows on the streets, which might surprise visitors. There are also plenty of birds like pigeons, parrots and peacocks, particularly in the quieter, greener parts of the city.

Did you have any pets when you were younger?

We had a pair of budgies when I was about eight. I was responsible for feeding them and cleaning the cage, which taught me a bit about responsibility. I was genuinely upset when they eventually passed away.

24. Photography

Do you like taking photos?

Yes, I do, although I'm definitely an amateur. I mostly take pictures of food, sunsets and family gatherings on my phone. I like having those moments to look back on, especially from festivals.

What do you usually do with your photos?

To be honest, most of them just sit on my phone. Every few months I clear out the blurry ones and back up the good ones. Occasionally I share a few with family on our group chat.

Would you like to learn more about photography?

I'd really like to, yes. I've watched a few online tutorials about composition and lighting, and it's fascinating how small changes make a huge difference. Maybe I'll take a short course once my exams are over.

25. Art**Are you interested in art?**

I'm interested, but I wouldn't call myself artistic. I enjoy looking at paintings, particularly traditional Indian folk art, because of the vibrant colours and intricate patterns. Creating it myself, though, isn't really my strength.

Did you enjoy drawing or painting at school?

I enjoyed it in primary school, when it was just about having fun with colours. As we got older and it became more about technique and marks, I lost interest a bit, because I wasn't particularly good at it.

Do you ever visit art galleries or exhibitions?

Occasionally, yes. There's a well-known art museum in Vadodara, and I've been there a few times, usually when relatives visit. I also go to local craft exhibitions during festivals, which I find quite inspiring.

26. Cooking**Do you like cooking?**

I do, though I'm still learning. I can make a few simple dishes like dal, rice and vegetable sabzi. I find it quite relaxing, and it's satisfying when my family actually enjoys what I've made.

Who does most of the cooking in your home?

My mother does most of it, to be honest, and she's an excellent cook. My father helps at weekends, and I try to pitch in when I can, especially by chopping vegetables or making tea.

Would you like to learn to cook more dishes?

Definitely. If I ever study or work abroad, I'll need to cook for myself, so I'm trying to learn more of my mother's recipes now. I'd especially like to master a few traditional Gujarati dishes.

27. Sleep**How many hours do you usually sleep?**

I usually get around six or seven hours, which is probably not quite enough. During exams it drops even more because I stay up revising. I'm trying to be stricter about going to bed on time.

Do you ever take a nap during the day?

Only at weekends, really. On weekdays I don't have the time. But on Sunday afternoons, after a heavy lunch, I often have a short nap, and I find it really refreshes me for the evening.

What do you do if you can't fall asleep?

I try not to look at my phone, since that makes it worse. Instead, I read a few pages of a book or listen to some calm music. Usually that helps me drift off within half an hour.

28. Social media

How much time do you spend on social media?

Probably more than I'd like to admit, around an hour or two a day. I mostly scroll during breaks or while commuting. I've recently set a time limit on my phone to cut down a little.

What do you mainly use social media for?

Mainly for keeping in touch with friends and following pages related to finance and current affairs. I don't post much myself, but I find it a handy way to stay updated on what's happening.

Do you think social media has more advantages or disadvantages?

I'd say it's a double-edged sword. It's brilliant for staying connected and learning new things, but it can also be addictive and make people compare their lives unfairly. It really depends on how you use it.

29. Messages and emails

Do you prefer sending messages or making phone calls?

I usually prefer messaging, because it's quicker and the other person can reply whenever it suits them. But for anything important or emotional, I'd rather call, since tone can easily be misunderstood in text.

How often do you write emails?

Fairly often now, mostly for college and my part-time job. I write to professors about assignments and occasionally to clients. For personal communication, though, I hardly ever use email, since a quick message is far easier.

Do you reply to messages immediately?

Not always, to be honest. If I'm studying or busy, I'll leave them for a while and reply later in one go. With family, though, I try to respond quickly so they don't worry.

30. Gifts

Do you like giving gifts?

Yes, I really do. I enjoy thinking about what someone would genuinely appreciate, rather than just buying something generic. Seeing their reaction when they open it is honestly more rewarding than receiving a gift myself.

What was the last gift you received?

The last one was a leather notebook and a nice pen from my cousin on my birthday. It was quite thoughtful, because she knows I like writing down my plans and to-do lists by hand.

Is it difficult to choose gifts for people?

Sometimes, yes, especially for older relatives who seem to have everything already. In those cases, I usually go for something practical, like a shawl or sweets, or I simply give money in an envelope, which is common here.

31. Birthdays

How do you usually celebrate your birthday?

Quite simply, actually. My family usually has a small cake at midnight, and then in the evening I go out for dinner with a few close friends. I'm not really one for big parties.

Which birthday do you remember the most?

Probably my eighteenth. My friends organised a surprise get-together at a friend's terrace, with decorations and food. I genuinely had no idea, and I was really touched by how much effort they'd put in.

Do you think birthdays are more important for children or adults?

I'd say children, generally. For kids, it's a huge event they look forward to all year. As adults, we tend to be busier and a bit less excited, although it's still nice to feel appreciated.

32. Colours

What is your favourite colour?

I'd say dark blue. It feels calm and quite classic to me, and I think it suits almost any occasion. Quite a lot of my clothes are in different shades of blue, now that I think about it.

Are there any colours you don't like?

I'm not a big fan of very bright neon colours, like fluorescent green. I find them a bit overwhelming. I don't mind them on sportswear, but I wouldn't choose them for clothes or my room.

Do colours have special meanings in your culture?

Yes, definitely. Red is considered auspicious and is often worn by brides, while bright colours generally are associated with celebrations. White, on the other hand, is traditionally linked with mourning, so people avoid it at festive events.

33. Handwriting

Do you often write by hand?

Less than before, but still quite a bit. I take handwritten notes in lectures because I remember things better that way. However, for assignments and anything formal, I almost always type on my laptop.

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Is your handwriting easy to read?

It's fairly legible when I'm being careful. But when I'm taking notes quickly, it becomes quite messy, and sometimes even I struggle to read it later. My teachers used to comment on that a lot.

Do you think handwriting is still important today?

I think it is, to some extent. Most exams in India are still handwritten, so it matters for students. Besides, writing by hand helps with memory and focus, so I don't think it should disappear completely.

34. Public transport

How often do you use public transport?

Not very often, honestly. I usually ride my scooter to college because it's faster and more flexible. I take the city bus or an auto rickshaw occasionally, mostly when it's raining heavily.

What is public transport like in your city?

It's decent but could be better. There's a city bus network and plenty of auto rickshaws, but buses can be crowded and don't always run on time. Many people still rely on their own two-wheelers.

Would you like to see more public transport in your city?

Absolutely. A metro system or more frequent buses would really reduce traffic and pollution. I think if it were reliable and affordable, a lot of people like me would happily leave their vehicles at home.

35. Learning languages

How many languages can you speak?

I can speak three: Gujarati, which is my mother tongue, plus Hindi and English. I picked up Hindi mostly through films and friends, while English I learnt properly at school and college.

Is English difficult to learn?

Certain aspects are tricky, I'd say. The grammar's manageable, but the spelling and pronunciation can be really inconsistent. For me, speaking fluently without hesitating was the hardest part, and I'm still working on it.

Would you like to learn another language?

Yes, I'd love to learn French or German at some point. I think it would open up more career opportunities and make travelling more enjoyable. Plus, learning a language helps you understand a different culture better.

36. Teachers and school

Did you enjoy going to school?

Mostly, yes. I loved being with my friends and I enjoyed subjects like maths and accountancy. The constant tests and homework could be stressful at times, but overall I have fond memories of those years.

Who was your favourite teacher?

My favourite was my accountancy teacher in higher secondary. She explained difficult concepts with everyday examples, which made them easy to grasp. She's actually a big reason I chose to study commerce.

Is your school still the same as when you studied there?

Not entirely. I visited recently and noticed they've added smart classrooms and a new computer lab. The building looks much the same, though, and a few of my old teachers are still there, which was lovely to see.

37. Childhood memories**What is your happiest childhood memory?**

Probably the summer holidays I spent at my grandparents' village. We'd climb trees, swim in the local pond and eat fresh mangoes every afternoon. Life felt so simple and carefree back then.

Did you play a lot of games as a child?

Yes, all the time. We mostly played outdoor games like cricket, hide-and-seek and kite flying with the neighbourhood kids. Kite flying during the winter festival was easily the highlight of the year for me.

Do you think children today have a different childhood from yours?

Quite different, I'd say. Children today spend much more time on screens and have more organised activities like coaching classes. My generation had more freedom to roam around and simply play outside.

38. Time management**Are you good at managing your time?**

I'm getting better at it. I used to leave everything until the last minute, especially assignments. Now I use a simple planner and break big tasks into smaller steps, which really helps me stay on track.

How do you plan your day?

Usually the night before, I jot down three or four priorities for the next day. I try to tackle the most demanding task in the morning, when my concentration is at its best, and leave lighter tasks for later.

Do you ever feel you don't have enough time?

Quite often, especially around exams or deadlines. Balancing studies, part-time work and family commitments can feel overwhelming. In those moments, I remind myself to focus on what's urgent and let the less important things wait.

39. Cafés and restaurants**How often do you eat out?**

Maybe once or twice a week. Usually it's a quick snack with friends after college, and occasionally a proper dinner with family at weekends. Eating out every day would be too expensive and not very healthy.

What kind of restaurants do you like?

I enjoy small, family-run places that serve authentic regional food, like a traditional Gujarati thali. I also like trying South Indian or Italian dishes now and then, as long as there are good vegetarian options.

Are there more cafés in your city now than before?

Yes, far more. When I was younger, there were only a handful. Now there are cafés on almost every main road, and they've become popular spots for students to study, chat or even hold small meetings.

40. Rain**Do you like rainy days?**

I do, as long as I don't have to go out. There's nothing better than sitting at home with a hot cup of tea and some fried snacks while it's pouring outside. It's a very cosy feeling.

Does it rain a lot where you live?

Only during the monsoon, which lasts roughly three to four months. The rest of the year is mostly dry. When the monsoon is strong, some roads get waterlogged, which can make commuting a real headache.

Did you enjoy playing in the rain as a child?

Absolutely, I loved it. My friends and I used to splash in puddles and make paper boats to float in the water. My mother would scold me for getting soaked, but it was completely worth it.

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SECTION 3

Part 2 cue cards with answers

30 cue cards, each with one-minute notes, a model answer, useful phrases and two Part 3 discussion questions with answers. Each model answer is a sample from a different speaker, so personal details vary from card to card.

CUE CARD 1

Describe a book you enjoyed reading.

You should say:

- what the book was
- when you read it
- what it was about

and explain why you enjoyed it.

One-minute notes

Wings of Fire · autobiography of Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam · read in Class 11 · childhood in Rameswaram · rockets and missiles · hard work, humble start · inspired me to keep going

Model answer

The book I'd like to talk about is Wings of Fire, the autobiography of Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, the scientist who later became President of India.

I read it when I was in Class 11. A teacher recommended it after I did badly in a maths test and was feeling quite low, and I remember finishing it in about a week, mostly on the bus to school.

The book follows his life from his childhood in Rameswaram, where his family had very little money, through his education and his long career working on India's rocket and missile programmes. What struck me was how honestly he wrote about failures, such as projects that went wrong, and how he and his team recovered from them.

I think I enjoyed it so much because it arrived at exactly the right time. I was starting to believe that some people are simply born talented and others aren't. His story showed me that steady effort and good mentors matter far more. Since then I've reread a few chapters before exams, and they still work as a kind of motivation.

Useful phrases

The book I'd like to talk about is... · What struck me was... · It arrived at exactly the right time. · It works as a kind of motivation.

Part 3 follow-up questions

Do young people read less than in the past?

I think they read just as much, but they read differently. Most of their reading is short content on phones, such as posts and articles, rather than full books. So the quantity may be similar, but the depth of reading has probably fallen.

Will printed books disappear in the future?

I doubt it. E-books are convenient, but many people still enjoy the feel of a printed book, and they're easier on the eyes. I expect both to exist side by side, much as radio survived the arrival of television.

CUE CARD 2

Describe a person who helped you achieve a goal.

You should say:

- who the person is
- what the goal was
- how they helped you

and explain how you felt about their help.

One-minute notes

cousin Neha · goal: pass driving test first time · weekend practice for a month · calm, patient · reversing and parking · nervous before, relieved and grateful after

Model answer

I'd like to talk about my cousin Neha, who is about five years older than me and works as a software engineer.

Last year my goal was to pass my driving test on the first attempt. Several of my friends had failed once or twice, mostly because of parking, so I was quite nervous about it.

Neha offered to help, and for about a month she took me out every Saturday and Sunday morning in her car. She chose quiet roads at first, and then gradually busier ones. What helped most was how calm she stayed. Whenever I made a mistake, she didn't shout. She simply asked me what I thought had gone wrong, and then we tried again. She also made me practice reversing and parking again and again until I could do it without thinking.

When I passed, I felt hugely relieved, but mostly grateful. She gave up her free weekends for me without expecting anything back. It also taught me something about teaching others: patience gets far better results than pressure.

Useful phrases

I'd like to talk about... · What helped most was... · She gave up her free time for me. · Patience gets better results than pressure.

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do some people find it hard to ask for help?

Often it's about pride or fear of looking weak. In competitive settings like school or work, people worry that asking for help suggests they're not capable. Ironically, those who ask early usually learn faster.

Should schools teach students how to mentor others?

I think it would be valuable. Explaining something to a younger student forces you to understand it properly, and it builds patience and communication skills that employers look for.

CUE CARD 3

Describe a place you visited that you would like to return to.

You should say:

- where it is
- when you went there
- what you did there

and explain why you would like to return.

One-minute notes

Rishikesh · Uttarakhand · Ganga · family trip, two years ago · evening aarti, river walks, small cafes · calm, wanted more time · go back with friends, try rafting

Model answer

The place I'd love to go back to is Rishikesh, a small town in the foothills of the Himalayas in Uttarakhand, on the banks of the Ganga.

I went there about two years ago with my family during the winter holidays. We only stayed for three days, which in hindsight was far too short.

Most of our time was spent walking along the river and exploring the narrow lanes full of small cafes and bookshops. One evening we watched the aarti ceremony by the river, with hundreds of lamps floating on the water, and that's probably the moment I remember most clearly. We also crossed one of the famous suspension bridges, which swayed a little and made my younger brother very nervous.

I'd like to return for two reasons. First, the place was incredibly peaceful, and I came home feeling rested in a way I rarely do. Second, there were things we simply didn't have time for, especially river rafting, which my parents thought was too risky. Next time I'd like to go with friends, stay at least a week, and try it.

Useful phrases

The place I'd love to go back to is... · In hindsight, it was far too short. · The moment I remember most clearly... · I'd like to return for two reasons.

Part 3 follow-up questions

How does tourism affect small towns?

It brings money and jobs, which is clearly positive. On the other hand, too many visitors can raise prices for local people and put pressure on the environment, so towns need some limits and careful planning.

Is it better to travel alone or in a group?

Both have advantages. Travelling alone gives you complete freedom and pushes you to talk to new people, while a group is safer and usually cheaper. For a first trip abroad, I'd probably recommend a small group.



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CUE CARD 4

Describe a skill you would like to learn.

You should say:

- what the skill is
- how you found out about it
- how you would learn it

and explain why you want to learn it.

One-minute notes

tabla · grandfather played at functions · his fingers flying · local music class · weekends + evening practice · patience · roots · switch off

Model answer

The skill I'd really love to learn is playing the tabla, which is a pair of small hand drums used in a lot of Indian classical and devotional music. I've always been drawn to it, but I've never actually sat down and learned it properly.

I first got interested in it as a kid, because my grandfather used to play at family functions in Vadodara. Whenever there was a wedding or a pooja at home, he'd bring out this battered old pair of drums, and within a few minutes everyone would be clapping along. What I remember most is how effortless he made it look, with his fingers just flying across the surface.

As for how I'd learn it, I think I'd start with a proper teacher, since there's a small music class about ten minutes from my house. I'd probably go on weekends, because my weekdays are packed with work, and then practice for twenty minutes or so every evening. I know it takes years to get good, so I'd have to be patient with myself.

As for why I want to learn it, honestly, it's partly about staying connected to my roots. My grandfather passed his drums on to me, and they're just gathering dust in a cupboard, which feels like a waste. Apart from that, I reckon learning an instrument would be a brilliant way to switch off after a long day staring at spreadsheets.

Useful phrases

One thing I've always wanted to do is... · I first got interested in it when... · What I remember most is... · It's partly about...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do adults often find it harder to learn new skills than children?

I think the main reason is time rather than ability. Children have hours every day set aside for learning, whereas adults are juggling jobs, families and bills, so practice gets squeezed out. Adults also tend to be more self-conscious and hate looking clumsy in front of others. That said, adults have real advantages too, like discipline and a clear purpose, so they can progress quickly if they're motivated.

Should schools teach more practical skills, such as cooking or managing money?

Yes, I'd say they definitely should. Plenty of young people in India finish school knowing complex formulas but have no idea how to budget or understand a payslip. Teaching basic money management, for example, could save them from serious debt later on. Of course, schools can't drop academic subjects, but even one practical lesson a week would make a real difference to how prepared students feel for adult life.

CUE CARD 5

Describe a time you helped someone.

You should say:

- who you helped
- when and where it happened
- how you helped them

and explain how you felt about helping them.

One-minute notes

elderly neighbour, Kantaben · monsoon flooding · society waterlogged · groceries + medicines · charged her phone · called her son · felt useful

Model answer

I'd like to talk about a time I helped an elderly neighbour of ours, Kantaben. She's in her late seventies and lives on her own on the ground floor of our building, because her son works in Pune.

It happened a couple of monsoons ago, when Vadodara had really heavy rain for about three days straight. The roads around our society were completely waterlogged, the power kept cutting out, and for a while nobody could get in or out. The situation was pretty tense, especially for older people living alone.

On the second morning, I noticed her door was half open and she looked quite anxious. It turned out she'd almost run out of her blood pressure tablets, and she had hardly any food left. So what I ended up doing was wading through knee-deep water to a chemist that was still open, and I picked up some milk, bread and vegetables on the way back. We also had a small inverter at home, so I charged her phone and helped her call her son, who'd been panicking because he couldn't reach her.

Looking back, I felt genuinely useful, which isn't something I feel every day, to be honest. She kept blessing me and sent over homemade theplas for about a week afterwards. More than that, it made me realise how isolated older people can become, and since then I've made a point of checking on her regularly.

Useful phrases

I'd like to talk about a time when... · The situation was pretty tense because... · What I ended up doing was... · Looking back, I felt...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Do you think people today are less willing to help strangers than in the past?

To some extent, yes, especially in big cities. People are busier and more cautious, partly because they hear stories about scams or getting into trouble for getting involved. In smaller towns, though, I'd say the community spirit is still quite strong. And during emergencies like floods, you often see ordinary people stepping up in amazing ways, so I don't think kindness has disappeared; it's just less visible day to day.

Should young people be required to do volunteer work?

I'm in two minds about it. On the one hand, volunteering teaches empathy and responsibility, and many students would never try it unless they had to. On the other hand, forcing people can make it feel like a chore, which defeats the purpose. Perhaps the best approach is for schools to offer lots of attractive options and give some credit for it, so students are encouraged rather than compelled.

CUE CARD 6

Describe a memorable journey you made.

You should say:

- where you went
- who you travelled with
- what happened on the journey

and explain why it was memorable.

One-minute notes

train to Varanasi · with grandmother · two nights · sleeper coach · shared food with family from Bihar · chai at stations · Ganga aarti · her wish

Model answer

The journey I'll never forget is a long train trip I took from Vadodara to Varanasi. It took almost two days, which sounds exhausting, but it turned out to be one of the best experiences I've had.

I travelled with my grandmother, who'd been saying for years that she wanted to see the Ganga in Varanasi at least once. My parents couldn't get leave from work, so I volunteered to take her, partly out of duty and partly because I was curious myself.

We were in a sleeper coach, and what made it even better was the family sharing our compartment. They were from Bihar, and within an hour my grandmother and the other grandmother were swapping recipes and complaining about their knees. We shared our theplas and they gave us some amazing homemade snacks. At one point, the train stopped for nearly an hour in the middle of nowhere, and everyone just got off, stretched their legs and drank chai on the platform. It was surprisingly peaceful.

The main reason it stuck with me, though, is how happy my grandmother was. When we finally watched the evening aarti on the ghats, with all the lamps floating on the river, she had tears in her eyes and just held my hand. I realised I'd helped her tick off something she'd dreamed about for decades, and that's a feeling I won't forget.

Useful phrases

The journey I'll never forget is... · What made it even better was... · At one point... · The main reason it stuck with me is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do some people prefer travelling by train rather than by plane?

I think it's partly about cost, since trains are much cheaper in India, but it's also about the experience. On a train you actually see the landscape changing, you meet people and you can move around freely. Flying is faster, of course, and for business trips that matters. But for families or older travellers who find airports stressful, a train often feels more relaxed and sociable.

How has travel changed for ordinary people in recent decades?

It's become far more accessible. A generation ago, most families in my area only travelled for weddings or pilgrimages, whereas now even students take weekend trips with friends. Cheaper flights, better roads and online booking have made a huge difference. The downside is that popular places get overcrowded, and some travellers rush from spot to spot taking photos without really experiencing anything, which is a bit of a shame.



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CUE CARD 7

Describe a piece of technology you find useful.

You should say:

- what it is
- when you got it
- how you use it

and explain why you find it useful.

One-minute notes

laptop · bought second-hand · first salary · work files + online classes · IELTS practice · light, long battery · independence · saves time

Model answer

The piece of technology I honestly couldn't do without is my laptop. It's nothing fancy, just a slim, mid-range machine, but it's become the centre of pretty much everything I do.

I got it shortly after I started my first job at an accounting firm. Before that I'd been sharing an ancient desktop with my younger sister, which led to endless arguments. With my first couple of salaries I bought this one second-hand from a colleague who was upgrading, and I remember feeling ridiculously proud carrying it home.

These days I mainly use it for work, since I often bring client files home during busy periods and need to finish reconciliations or reports. In the evenings it's my study tool. I'm preparing for IELTS at the moment, so I do listening practice and timed writing tasks on it, and I also attend a couple of online classes. On weekends, admittedly, it turns into an entertainment centre, and I'll watch a film or two on it.

What makes it so useful is the flexibility. It's light enough to carry in my bag, the battery lasts almost a whole day, and I can work from anywhere, whether that's the office, a café or my bedroom. More than that, it gave me a sense of independence, because it was the first big thing I bought with my own money.

Useful phrases

The piece of technology I couldn't do without is... · I got it shortly after... · These days I mainly use it for... · What makes it so useful is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Do you think people rely too much on technology nowadays?

In many ways, yes. A lot of people can't navigate their own city without a phone or remember even a few phone numbers. That dependence becomes a problem when the battery dies or the internet goes down. Having said that, technology has made life far more efficient, so the issue isn't using it but losing basic skills completely. I think we need a balance, using it as a tool rather than a crutch.

Is technology making older people feel left out?

Sometimes it does, particularly when banks or government offices move everything online. My grandmother, for instance, struggles with online forms and feels embarrassed asking for help. On the other hand, many older people have happily embraced video calls to stay in touch with family abroad. So I'd say the key is patient support from younger relatives and keeping simple offline options available for those who need them.

CUE CARD 8

Describe a teacher who influenced you.

You should say:

- who the teacher was
- what subject they taught
- what they were like

and explain how they influenced you.

One-minute notes

Mr Trivedi · Accountancy, Class 11 · strict but funny · real-life examples · tea stall accounts · believed in me · chose commerce career

Model answer

The teacher who made the biggest difference to me was Mr Trivedi, who taught me Accountancy in Class 11 and 12 at my school in Vadodara. He was in his fifties, always wore the same grey sweater in winter, and had a very loud laugh that you could hear from the corridor.

Accountancy can be a really dry subject, all debits and credits, but he had a knack for making it come alive. Instead of just following the textbook, he'd use examples from everyday life. I'll always remember the time he made us prepare the accounts for an imaginary tea stall outside the school gate, including how much milk and sugar it used. Suddenly the numbers actually meant something.

He was quite strict, mind you. If you hadn't done your homework, he'd make you stand and explain why in front of everyone, which was mortifying. But he was also incredibly patient when someone genuinely didn't understand, and he'd stay back after class to go through things again.

As for how he influenced me, it was huge. At that point I wasn't sure commerce was the right choice, and my marks were average. He told me I had a good eye for detail and encouraged me to think about a career in finance. If it weren't for him, I probably wouldn't be working at an accounting firm today.

Useful phrases

The teacher who made the biggest difference to me was... · He had a knack for... · I'll always remember the time... · If it weren't for him...

Part 3 follow-up questions

What qualities make someone a good teacher?

In my view, the most important quality is the ability to explain things clearly and connect them to real life. Knowing the subject is obviously essential, but plenty of experts are terrible at teaching. Patience matters too, because students learn at different speeds. And I'd add genuine interest in students as people, since a teacher who notices when someone is struggling can change the course of that student's life.

Will online learning ever replace classroom teachers?

I doubt it will replace them completely. Online platforms are excellent for flexible practice and reaching students in remote areas, and they've helped millions of people. But younger learners especially need the discipline, encouragement and social interaction that a classroom provides. I think the future is more likely to be a blend, where teachers use technology to support their lessons rather than being pushed aside by it.

CUE CARD 9

Describe an important decision you made.

You should say:

- what the decision was
- when you made it
- who you talked to about it

and explain why it was important.

One-minute notes

commerce vs science after Class 10 · relatives pushed engineering · talked to parents + cousin · liked numbers, business · nervous · right choice

Model answer

One of the biggest decisions I've ever made was choosing to study commerce instead of science after Class 10. It might sound like a small thing, but in Gujarat, and in India generally, it's treated almost like a life-or-death choice.

I made it when I was about fifteen, right after my board results came out. My marks were good enough for science, so lots of relatives assumed I'd go for engineering. There was a lot of pressure from uncles and aunties at family gatherings, who kept saying things like science opens every door.

I talked it over mainly with my parents and my older cousin, who'd done a commerce degree and was working in banking. My cousin was really honest about the pros and cons, and he pointed out that I'd always loved anything to do with money and business, like helping my dad with the accounts for his small hardware shop. My parents, to their credit, said they'd support whatever I chose, as long as I took it seriously.

In the end, I decided to go with commerce, and I was quite nervous about it. It turned out to be important because it shaped everything that followed, my degree, my job and even my plan to study finance abroad. It was also the first time I really trusted my own judgement instead of just following what others expected.

Useful phrases

One of the biggest decisions I've ever made was... · There was a lot of pressure to... · In the end, I decided to... · It turned out to be important because...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Should parents make important decisions for their children?

I think it depends on the child's age. Parents obviously need to make decisions for young children, about health or schooling, for instance. But once someone is a teenager, they should have a real say, especially about their career. Parents can offer valuable experience and advice, but if they force a path on their child, it often leads to resentment and an unhappy working life later.

Why do some people find it difficult to make decisions?

Partly it's fear of making the wrong choice and regretting it. These days we also have so many options, whether it's careers or just phones, that comparing them becomes overwhelming. Some people simply haven't had much practice, because others have always decided for them. I think breaking a decision into smaller questions and accepting that no choice is perfect can make the process much less stressful.

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CUE CARD 10

Describe a festival or celebration in your country.

You should say:

- what the festival is
- when it takes place
- how people celebrate it

and explain why it is important to you.

One-minute notes

Navratri · nine nights, autumn · garba + dandiya · huge grounds in Vadodara · chaniya choli, kediya · practice weeks before · community, family

Model answer

The celebration I look forward to most is Navratri, which literally means nine nights. It's a Hindu festival honouring the goddess Durga, and in Gujarat it's probably the biggest event of the whole year.

It usually falls around September or October, just after the monsoon ends, so the weather's starting to cool down a bit. And Vadodara is actually famous for it, so people come from all over India and even abroad to join in.

The main way people celebrate is through garba, which is a circular folk dance performed around a lamp or an image of the goddess, and dandiya, where you dance with small wooden sticks. The whole city seems to come alive at night. There are huge open grounds with live singers and drummers, and thousands of people dancing in perfect circles until well past midnight. Everyone dresses up too, girls in colourful embroidered chaniya cholis and guys in kediya, which is a traditional flared top. My friends and I usually start practicing new steps weeks in advance, because nobody wants to look clumsy on the first night.

For me personally, it means community. During those nine nights, it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, young or old, everyone's dancing side by side. It's also when I see relatives and old school friends I've lost touch with. So even though I'm exhausted by the end, it's honestly the happiest part of my year.

Useful phrases

The celebration I look forward to most is... · It usually falls around... · The whole city seems to... · For me personally, it means...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Are traditional festivals losing their meaning in modern times?

I'd say they're changing rather than losing their meaning. In cities, festivals have definitely become more commercial, with sponsored events, expensive outfits and loads of shopping. Some older people feel the spiritual side is being overshadowed. But at the same time, festivals still bring families together and keep traditions alive, especially for young people who might otherwise have little connection to their culture. So the core purpose is still there.

Do you think it's important for children to learn about festivals from other cultures?

Yes, I think it's really valuable. In a diverse country like India, understanding why your neighbours celebrate Eid, Christmas or Pongal builds respect and reduces prejudice. Schools can play a big role here, for example by holding small celebrations or inviting parents to share their traditions. Children who grow up curious about other cultures are usually more open-minded adults, which benefits society as a whole.

CUE CARD 11

Describe a time you were very busy.

You should say:

- when it was
- what you had to do
- how you managed your time

and explain how you felt during that time.

One-minute notes

tax filing season · accounting firm · dozens of returns · client calls · sister's engagement same week · to-do lists · early mornings · drained but proud

Model answer

The busiest stretch I can remember was during tax filing season last summer, a few months after I'd joined the accounting firm where I work in Vadodara.

Basically, almost every client wants their income tax return filed in the final couple of weeks before the deadline, so the office goes into a kind of controlled panic. I was responsible for preparing returns for around forty individual clients, which meant chasing them for documents, checking bank statements and answering endless phone calls from people asking whether they'd get a refund. On top of that, my cousin's engagement happened to fall in the very same week, and since I'm the one in the family who's good with organising things, I'd promised to handle the catering bookings and the guest list.

The only way I got through it was by being incredibly disciplined. I made a detailed to-do list every night and ranked tasks by urgency. I started getting to the office at eight instead of ten, when it was quiet and I could actually concentrate. I also learned to say no to small requests that could wait, which isn't easy for me.

By the end of it, I felt completely drained, to be honest. I think I slept for twelve hours the day after the deadline. But I also felt quietly proud, because every return was filed on time and the engagement went off without a hitch. It showed me I can cope under pressure.

Useful phrases

The busiest stretch I can remember was... · On top of that... · The only way I got through it was... · By the end of it, I felt...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do people seem busier today than in the past?

I think technology is a big part of it. Because we're always reachable by phone, work spills into evenings and weekends, so we never really switch off. People also try to fit more into their lives, like side jobs, courses and social commitments. Ironically, many labour-saving devices haven't given us more free time, because we just fill the gap with more tasks. Expectations have simply risen.

Is being busy always a bad thing?

Not necessarily. Being busy with meaningful work can be really satisfying and gives people a sense of purpose. Lots of people actually feel restless or low when they have nothing to do. The problem comes when busyness becomes constant and leaves no time for rest, family or health. So I'd say short busy periods are fine, even motivating, but long-term overload is harmful and often leads to burnout.



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CUE CARD 12

Describe a park or garden you like to visit.

You should say:

- where it is
- what it looks like
- what you do there

and explain why you like visiting it.

One-minute notes

Sayaji Baug, Vadodara · huge, old trees · toy train, museum · morning walks with dad · bhel after childhood memories · green, calm

Model answer

A place I keep going back to is Sayaji Baug, which is a huge public garden right in the middle of Vadodara. Locals also call it Kamati Baug, and it's been around for well over a century, so it's a real landmark in the city.

It's enormous, much bigger than most city parks in India, and the Vishwamitri river runs along one side of it. It's dotted with massive old banyan and neem trees that give lots of shade, plus wide lawns, flower beds and winding paths. Inside there's also a small zoo, a museum, a planetarium and a toy train that loops around the grounds, which kids absolutely love.

These days I usually go on Sunday mornings with my dad. We walk two or three rounds of the main path while he tells me about office gossip or cricket, and then we end up at a stall near the gate for bhel and a cutting chai. Sometimes, if I've had a stressful week, I'll go alone in the evening, just sit on a bench and listen to music while the sky changes colour.

What draws me there is partly nostalgia. I used to ride that toy train as a little kid, and I still remember being terrified of the crocodiles in the zoo. But it's also simply one of the few places in the city where you can escape the traffic noise and feel properly calm.

Useful phrases

A place I keep going back to is... · It's dotted with... · I usually end up... · What draws me there is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why are public parks important in cities?

Parks are basically the lungs of a city. They improve air quality, reduce heat and give wildlife somewhere to live. Socially, they're one of the few free spaces where people of all backgrounds can relax, exercise or meet friends. For families living in small flats without gardens, a nearby park can make a huge difference to children's health and happiness. So I'd say they're essential, not a luxury.

Should governments spend more money on green spaces or on housing?

That's a tricky one, because both are urgent in growing cities. Housing is a basic need, and many people live in really overcrowded conditions. However, if we build on every open space, cities become unbearably hot and unhealthy. I think the smartest approach is to plan them together, for example by requiring new housing projects to include parks and trees, rather than treating it as one or the other.

CUE CARD 13**Describe a gift you gave to someone.**

You should say:

- what the gift was
- who you gave it to
- how you chose it

and explain why you chose this gift.

One-minute notes

photo album · for mum's 50th · old family photos · borrowed from aunt's trunk · handwritten captions
· weeks of work · she cried · personal > expensive

Model answer

The gift I'm proudest of is a handmade photo album I put together for my mum's fiftieth birthday. It wasn't expensive at all, but it's easily the most meaningful thing I've ever given anyone.

Mum had always talked about how most of the photos from her childhood and early married life had been lost or damaged over the years. So, about two months before her birthday, I quietly started collecting old pictures. My aunt in Anand had a whole trunk full of black-and-white prints, so I went there one weekend and spent hours going through them. I also secretly asked her old college friends to send me scans on their phones.

It took me ages to put it together. I bought a thick album with cream pages from a stationery shop near my office, arranged the photos in order from her childhood to the present, and wrote a little caption under each one, like a funny memory or a quote from someone who was there. My sister helped with the decorations, though she mainly ate snacks and gave advice.

Her reaction was priceless. She went completely quiet, then started crying and laughing at the same time, turning every page really slowly. As for why I chose it, I just felt that at fifty, she didn't need another sari or kitchen gadget. She needed something that showed how much her life meant to all of us.

Useful phrases

The gift I'm proudest of is... · It took me ages to... · Her reaction was priceless... · The reason I went for it was...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Do you think people spend too much money on gifts these days?

In many cases, yes. Weddings and festivals in India have become occasions for showing off, and people feel pressured to give expensive gifts so they don't look stingy. Online shopping and advertising make it even easier to overspend. Personally, I think a thoughtful, inexpensive gift often means far more. That said, for close family, spending a bit more on something genuinely useful can also be a way of showing care.

Why is gift-giving important in many cultures?

Gift-giving is a way of strengthening relationships and expressing feelings that people might find hard to say out loud, like gratitude or affection. In many cultures, including mine, gifts also mark important life events, such as births, weddings or a new home. They create a sense of give and take that keeps families and communities connected. Of course, the meaning behind the gift matters more than the gift itself.

CUE CARD 14

Describe a goal you want to achieve in the future.

You should say:

- what the goal is
- when you set it
- how you plan to achieve it

and explain why this goal is important to you.

One-minute notes

Master's in finance abroad · set after second year at work · IELTS band 7 · saving monthly · research universities · first in family · independence

Model answer

A goal I've been working towards for a while is doing a Master's in finance at a university abroad, probably in the UK or Australia. It's a big step, but I'm fairly determined to make it happen in the next couple of years.

The idea first came to me during my second year at the accounting firm. I was enjoying the work, but I noticed that the people getting the most interesting projects, like international audits, almost all had overseas qualifications. A senior colleague who'd studied in Melbourne told me it had completely changed the way she thinks about business, and that conversation really stuck with me.

My plan is fairly straightforward, though not easy. First, I need a strong IELTS score, at least band 7 overall, so I'm practicing every evening and doing a full mock test every weekend. Second, I'm saving a fixed amount from my salary every month, since I don't want my parents to sell anything or take a big loan for me. And third, I'm shortlisting universities, comparing course content, fees and scholarships, and I've already contacted a couple of alumni online.

It matters to me because nobody in my family has studied abroad before. My dad never even had the chance to finish college. So for me it's about proving that it's possible, and also about becoming genuinely independent and bringing new skills back to my career.

Useful phrases

A goal I've been working towards is... · The idea first came to me when... · My plan is fairly straightforward... · It matters to me because...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Is it better to set big long-term goals or small short-term ones?

I think we need both, working together. A big goal gives you direction and motivation, but on its own it can feel overwhelming and far away. Small short-term goals, like finishing one practice test a week, make progress visible and keep you going. For example, someone who wants to run a marathon won't get there without a weekly training plan. So the ideal is a long-term vision broken into manageable steps.

Why do many young people want to study abroad?

There are several reasons. Many believe a foreign degree will lead to better job opportunities and higher salaries, both overseas and back home. Others are attracted by the chance to experience a new culture and become more independent. Some also see it as a pathway to settling abroad permanently. However, it's very expensive, and I think students should research carefully, because an overseas degree alone doesn't guarantee success.



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CUE CARD 15

Describe a time you learned something from a mistake.

You should say:

- what the mistake was
- when it happened
- what the consequences were

and explain what you learned from it.

One-minute notes

sent wrong file to client · first month at work · didn't double-check · manager embarrassed · apologised · now check twice · own mistakes

Model answer

I'd like to talk about a time I really messed up at work, which happened in my very first month at the accounting firm. Basically, I emailed a client the wrong financial statement, one that actually belonged to a completely different company.

It was a Friday evening and I was rushing to clear my inbox before the weekend. Both clients had similar names, and the files were saved in the same folder, so I just attached the first one I saw and hit send. At the time, I didn't realise anything was wrong, and I went home feeling pretty pleased with how productive I'd been.

The fallout was quite serious. On Monday morning, the client phoned my manager, rather annoyed, because obviously they'd seen another firm's confidential figures. My manager had to apologise personally, and we had to ask them to delete the email. I was called into her office, and honestly, I wanted the ground to swallow me up. She was firm but fair. She didn't shout, but she made it clear how much this could damage the firm's reputation.

The lesson I took away was twofold. Firstly, never send anything important in a hurry; I now always open every attachment and check the name twice before sending. Secondly, I learned to own my mistakes. I apologised straight away instead of making excuses, and I think that's actually why my manager started trusting me more afterwards.

Useful phrases

I'd like to talk about a time I really messed up... · At the time, I didn't realise... · The fallout was... · The lesson I took away was...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why are some people afraid of making mistakes?

A lot of it comes from how we're brought up. In many schools, mistakes are punished with low marks or criticism, so children learn to see failure as shameful rather than as part of learning. In workplaces, people may also fear losing their job or looking incompetent. Unfortunately, this fear often stops people from trying new things. A culture that treats mistakes as learning opportunities usually encourages more creativity.

Should parents let children learn from their own mistakes?

Within reason, yes. If parents always step in to fix everything, children never develop problem-solving skills or resilience. Forgetting homework and facing the teacher's reaction, for instance, teaches responsibility far better than a lecture. However, parents obviously need to protect children from mistakes with serious consequences, like anything involving safety. So it's about letting them fail in small, safe ways and then talking it through.

CUE CARD 16

Describe a restaurant or café you like.

You should say:

- where it is
- what kind of food it serves
- how often you go there

and explain why you like it.

One-minute notes

small café near Alkapuri · Gujarati-fusion · khichdi bowls, masala tea · Friday evenings · friends · cosy, books · owner remembers order

Model answer

My go-to spot is a small café in Alkapuri, which is a fairly busy commercial area of Vadodara. It's tucked away on the first floor above a stationery shop, so you'd honestly walk right past it unless someone told you about it.

It serves what I'd call modern Gujarati food with a bit of a twist. Their signature dish is a khichdi bowl topped with crispy onions, roasted peanuts and a spicy kadhi on the side, which sounds simple but is incredibly comforting. They also do brilliant masala tea in tiny clay cups, and some unusual things like dhokla sandwiches. Everything's vegetarian, which suits my family perfectly.

I go there most Fridays after work with a couple of friends from college, so it's become a bit of a ritual. We grab the same corner table by the window, order far too much food and catch up on the week. Occasionally I'll also go alone on a Sunday morning with a book, because it's very quiet then.

What keeps me coming back is the atmosphere more than anything. The place is cosy, with mismatched wooden chairs, old Gujarati film posters and a shelf of second-hand books you can borrow. The owner, a retired schoolteacher, knows all the regulars and usually remembers my order before I even sit down. In a city that's getting busier every year, it feels a bit like a second home.

Useful phrases

My go-to spot is... · Their signature dish is... · It's become a bit of a ritual... · What keeps me coming back is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do people eat out more often than they did in the past?

I think it's mainly about lifestyle changes. With both partners working in many families, there's less time and energy for cooking every day. Incomes have also risen, so eating out is more affordable than it was for our parents. Plus, food delivery apps make it incredibly convenient. Socially, restaurants and cafés have become places to meet friends, whereas previously people would usually gather at someone's home.

Is home-cooked food always healthier than restaurant food?

Generally speaking, yes, because at home you control the amount of oil, salt and sugar, and you know exactly what's going in. Restaurant food is often richer to make it tastier. However, it isn't always true. Some home cooking in India, for example, uses a lot of ghee and fried snacks, while some restaurants now offer quite healthy, balanced options. So it really depends on the choices people make.

CUE CARD 17

Describe a sport or exercise you enjoy.

You should say:

- what it is
- when you started doing it
- how often you do it

and explain why you enjoy it.

One-minute notes

badminton · started age twelve · school coach · society court · three evenings a week · with neighbours · fast, social · stress buster

Model answer

The sport I'm hooked on is badminton. It's hugely popular in India, partly because you don't need much space or expensive equipment, just a couple of rackets, a shuttlecock and a net.

I picked it up when I was about twelve. Our school had an indoor court, and the PE teacher there was a former state-level player who spotted that I had quick reflexes. He started coaching a small group of us before school, which meant waking up at six, something I grumbled about constantly at the time. I even played in a couple of inter-school tournaments, although we never got past the quarter-finals.

These days I try to play at least three evenings a week. There's a court in our housing society, and a group of neighbours, ranging from college students to a retired bank manager in his sixties, meets there around seven. We usually play doubles for an hour or so, and it gets surprisingly competitive. That retired gentleman, by the way, is annoyingly good and beats most of us.

The thing I love most about it is how fast and intense it is. You really can't think about anything else while you're chasing a shuttle, so it's a brilliant stress buster after a day full of numbers and deadlines. It's also very social. Some of my closest friendships in the neighbourhood started on that court, and we often end up having chai together afterwards.

Useful phrases

The sport I'm hooked on is... · I picked it up when... · These days I try to... · The thing I love most about it is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why don't more adults exercise regularly?

Lack of time is the excuse I hear most often, especially from people with long working hours and family responsibilities. But I think motivation is the bigger issue, because exercise feels like a chore if you're doing it alone. Cost can also be a barrier, since gyms are expensive. Finding an enjoyable activity, like a team sport or dancing, usually makes it much easier to stick with long term.

Should governments invest more in sports facilities?

I believe they should, because it pays off in public health. When people have free or cheap access to courts, pools or parks, they're far more likely to stay active, which reduces lifestyle diseases and pressure on hospitals. It also helps discover young talent from poorer backgrounds. However, the money has to be spent wisely, on facilities that ordinary people use, not just a few showpiece stadiums.



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CUE CARD 18

Describe a time you had to wait for something.

You should say:

- what you waited for
- where you waited
- how long you waited

and explain how you felt while waiting.

One-minute notes

board exam results · summer after Class 12 · website crashed · whole family around computer · three hours · nervous, restless · relief

Model answer

One wait I'll never forget was the morning my Class 12 board exam results were announced. In India, those results feel like they decide your entire future, so the whole family treats it as a major event.

The results were supposed to be published online at ten o'clock, so I was sitting at the old computer in our living room from about half past nine. To make matters worse, my whole family had gathered around me, my parents, my grandmother, my little sister and even an uncle who'd come over specially, all staring at the screen.

Of course, at exactly ten, the website crashed because lakhs of students were trying to log in at the same moment. We kept refreshing it again and again, and every time we just got an error message. My dad tried on his phone, my uncle tried on his, and my grandmother kept saying prayers under her breath. In the end, I had to wait nearly three hours before the page finally loaded.

It felt like forever because I couldn't do anything else. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sit still, and I kept imagining the worst possible marks. I was pacing up and down the room, and my mum finally made me drink some lemon water. When the result finally came and I saw I'd scored well in Accountancy and Economics, I felt this huge wave of relief, and then everyone started hugging me at once.

Useful phrases

One wait I'll never forget was... · To make matters worse... · It felt like forever because... · When it finally came, I felt...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Are people today less patient than they used to be?

I'd say yes, mostly because of technology. We're used to instant messages, fast deliveries and videos that load in seconds, so even a short delay feels frustrating. Our parents' generation waited weeks for a letter or months for a telephone connection. However, people still show patience in some areas, like saving for a house or studying for years, so it isn't that patience has vanished entirely.

How can public services reduce waiting times?

Technology can help a great deal. Online appointment systems, for example, mean people don't have to queue for hours at government offices or hospitals. Hiring more staff during peak periods would also make a difference. In addition, simplifying paperwork would speed things up, since many delays happen because forms are complicated. Of course, all this requires investment, but in the long run it saves everyone time and frustration.

CUE CARD 19

Describe a family member you admire.

You should say:

- who the person is
- what they are like
- what they have done

and explain why you admire them.

One-minute notes

mum · science teacher · calm, organised · went back to study at 40 · B.Ed by correspondence · nights after housework · never complains · determination

Model answer

The person in my family I look up to most is my mum. She teaches science at a government school in Vadodara, and she's probably the most organised human being I've ever met.

She's the kind of person who stays calm no matter what's happening. If a pressure cooker explodes, the electricity goes off and guests arrive early all at once, she'll just quietly deal with each problem one by one. She's also incredibly generous with her time. Neighbours' kids regularly turn up at our door for help with their homework, and she never turns them away.

What really stands out, though, is that she went back to studying in her forties. She'd married quite young and never had the chance to finish her teaching qualification. So when my sister and I were in school, she enrolled in a B.Ed course by correspondence. For two years she'd finish all the cooking and housework, help us with our homework, and then sit at the dining table studying until midnight. She passed with distinction, and soon afterwards she got her permanent teaching job.

I admire her because she never once complained or made it seem like a sacrifice, even though I now realise how exhausted she must have been. She taught me that it's never too late to go after something you want. Honestly, whenever I feel like giving up on my IELTS preparation, I just think about her at that dining table.

Useful phrases

The person in my family I look up to most is... · She's the kind of person who... · What really stands out is... · I admire her because...

Part 3 follow-up questions

How has the role of women in Indian families changed?

It's changed quite dramatically, especially in cities. Far more women are now educated and working, and they have a bigger say in financial decisions and their children's futures. Many families also depend on two incomes. However, in a lot of households, women are still expected to handle most of the cooking and childcare on top of their jobs. So there's been real progress, but responsibilities at home haven't fully caught up.

Do children today respect their elders as much as in the past?

I think the way respect is shown has changed more than the respect itself. In the past, children rarely questioned elders and followed their decisions without argument. Today, young people are more likely to express their own opinions, which some older people see as disrespect. But most young people I know still care deeply about their grandparents and parents. They simply have a more open, equal kind of relationship with them.

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CUE CARD 20

Describe a film you watched recently.

You should say:

- what the film was about
- where you watched it
- who you watched it with

and explain what you thought of it.

One-minute notes

Gujarati family drama · old father, three grown children · selling ancestral house · cinema, weekend · with parents · funny then emotional · dad quiet

Model answer

The last film that really stayed with me was a Gujarati family drama I watched at the cinema a few weeks ago. It wasn't a big-budget production at all, just a small, honest story, but it got people talking all across the city.

The story revolves around an elderly widower living alone in a crumbling old house in a small town in Saurashtra. His three grown-up children, who all live in different cities, come back home after years because they want to sell the house. Without giving too much away, the visit stirs up lots of old arguments and secrets, and slowly each of them starts to understand their father in a completely different way.

I watched it at a multiplex near our place on a Saturday evening with my parents. To be honest, I only went because my mum really wanted to see it, and I expected it to be a bit slow and preachy. But the first half was genuinely hilarious, especially the scenes where the siblings bicker over who should sleep in which room, and the whole audience was roaring with laughter.

Overall, I thought it was brilliant, mainly because it felt so real. The dialogue sounded exactly like conversations in my own family. The second half was quite emotional, and I noticed my dad went very quiet during the ending. On the drive home he called his own brother, whom he hadn't spoken to properly in months, which says a lot about the film's impact.

Useful phrases

The last film that really stayed with me was... · The story revolves around... · Without giving too much away... · Overall, I thought it was...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Do you think people prefer watching films at home rather than in the cinema now?

For everyday viewing, yes, I think most people do. Streaming platforms offer huge choice at a low cost, and you can pause whenever you like. Going to the cinema has become quite expensive, especially for a family once you add snacks. However, for big releases or special occasions, people still love the cinema experience, the giant screen, the sound and the shared reactions of the audience. Both clearly have their place.

Should films made in regional languages receive more support?

Absolutely, I think they should. Regional cinema tells stories rooted in local culture, language and everyday life, which big mainstream films often ignore. It also helps keep languages like Gujarati or Marathi alive for younger generations. Support could include tax benefits, film festivals or guaranteed screens in cinemas. Of course, the films still need good scripts to succeed, but a little help can give talented local filmmakers a fair chance.

CUE CARD 21

Describe a time you received good news.

You should say:

- what the news was
- when you received it
- how you received it

and explain how you felt about it.

One-minute notes

job offer · final semester of BCom · email during lecture · interviewed twice · rushed to call dad · celebrated with pedas · relief, pride

Model answer

The best news I've had in a long time was when I found out I'd got my first proper job offer, at the accounting firm where I work now. It came through in the final semester of my BCom degree, when I was getting quite anxious about the future.

I'd been through two rounds of interviews a few weeks earlier. The second one was with a senior partner, and I came out convinced I'd blown it, because I'd stumbled over a question about depreciation methods, which is pretty basic. So I'd more or less given up hope and started applying to other places.

I received the news by email, of all things, while I was in the middle of a really boring lecture on business law. My phone buzzed, and I glanced at it under the desk, expecting some spam. I could hardly believe it when I saw the words offer of employment in the subject line. I read it about five times just to make sure. I had to sit through another forty minutes of the lecture, barely able to stop grinning, and then I rushed out to call my dad.

It meant a lot to me because my family had sacrificed quite a bit for my education. My dad was so proud that he went straight to the sweet shop and bought a big box of pedas to distribute to the whole society. Mostly, though, I just felt enormous relief that all those years of study had actually paid off.

Useful phrases

The best news I've had in a long time was... · I was in the middle of... · I could hardly believe... · It meant a lot to me because...

Part 3 follow-up questions

How do people usually share good news nowadays?

These days, most people share good news through messaging apps or social media, often within minutes. It's quick and lets you tell lots of people at once. However, for really big news, like an engagement or a new job, many people in India still prefer to tell close family in person or by phone first. And there's still the tradition of distributing sweets, which I think makes the moment feel more personal and memorable.

Why do news channels often focus on negative stories?

Mainly because negative stories attract more attention, and attention means viewers and advertising money. Humans are naturally alert to danger, so stories about crime or disasters grab us more than positive ones. Of course, the media also has a duty to report problems so they can be addressed. But I think constant negativity can make people anxious and cynical, so a bit more balance with positive, constructive stories would be healthier.



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CUE CARD 22

Describe a building you find interesting.

You should say:

- what the building is
- where it is
- what it looks like

and explain why you find it interesting.

One-minute notes

Laxmi Vilas Palace · Vadodara · built for royal family · Indo-Saracenic · domes, arches, stained glass · school trip + recent visit · history, craftsmanship

Model answer

A building that's always fascinated me is the Laxmi Vilas Palace in Vadodara. It was built for the city's royal family well over a hundred years ago, and parts of it are still lived in by their descendants, while other sections are open to visitors.

It's set in huge grounds right in the city, surrounded by lawns and old trees, so you suddenly feel miles away from the traffic outside. From the outside, it looks almost like something out of a fairy tale. The style mixes Indian, Islamic and European architecture, so you've got onion-shaped domes, pointed arches, tall towers and intricate carvings all in one structure. The stone has a warm, pinkish-orange colour that glows beautifully around sunset.

The first time I went inside was on a school trip when I was about ten, and honestly, I was more interested in the packed lunch. But I went back last winter with a cousin visiting from abroad, and this time I was stunned. The main hall has stained-glass windows, marble floors, mosaics and enormous chandeliers, and there's an armoury full of old swords and shields.

What I find so interesting is the craftsmanship. Our guide explained that artisans spent years on the carvings and mosaics, all by hand, without any modern machinery. It also tells you a lot about the city's history, since the royal family invested heavily in education and the arts here. It makes me feel quite proud of Vadodara, actually.

Useful phrases

A building that's always fascinated me is... · From the outside, it looks... · The first time I went inside... · What I find so interesting is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Should old buildings be preserved or replaced with modern ones?

I think historically important buildings should definitely be preserved, because once they're gone, they can't be replaced, and they connect us to our past. They also attract tourism, which benefits the local economy. That said, not every old building is valuable, and cities do need space for housing and infrastructure. A sensible approach is to protect significant buildings while allowing ordinary, unsafe ones to be redeveloped.

How does architecture affect the way people feel?

Quite strongly, in my opinion. Spacious buildings with natural light and greenery tend to make people feel calm and positive, while cramped, dark offices can be really draining. Hospitals designed with gardens and windows, for example, have been linked to patients recovering more comfortably. Even public buildings send a message; a welcoming library encourages people to stay. So good design isn't just about looks, it shapes our mood and behaviour.

CUE CARD 23

Describe a habit you want to change.

You should say:

- what the habit is
- when it started
- how it affects you

and explain how you plan to change it.

One-minute notes

late-night phone scrolling · began in college exams · asleep at 2 am · tired at work · eye strain · phone outside bedroom · alarm clock · reading

Model answer

A habit I'm not proud of is scrolling on my phone late at night. I'll get into bed intending to sleep, think I'll just check my messages for a minute, and suddenly it's almost two in the morning and I've watched about fifty short videos about cooking or cricket.

It all started during my final-year college exams. I used to take short breaks from studying by looking at my phone, and gradually those breaks got longer and moved later into the night. When exams finished, the studying stopped, but the scrolling didn't.

The knock-on effect is pretty obvious. I'm often groggy when my alarm goes off at seven, and I drink far too much tea at the office just to stay alert. My eyes feel strained by the afternoon, and I've noticed I'm more irritable with my family, which isn't fair on them. It also eats into my IELTS preparation, because I'm too tired to study properly in the evenings.

What I'm planning to do is quite simple, at least in theory. I've bought a cheap old-fashioned alarm clock, so I can leave my phone charging in the living room instead of next to my bed. I'm also going to keep a novel on my bedside table and read a chapter before sleeping. My sister has promised to tell me off if she catches me cheating, and I suspect she'll enjoy that a bit too much.

Useful phrases

A habit I'm not proud of is... · It all started when... · The knock-on effect is... · What I'm planning to do is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do some people find it hard to change their habits?

Habits are basically automatic, so we do them without really thinking, which makes them hard to notice, let alone stop. Many bad habits, like eating junk food or scrolling, also give an instant reward, while the benefits of changing only appear much later. Stress makes it even harder, since people fall back on comfortable routines. Replacing a habit with a better one, rather than simply stopping, usually works best.

Should technology companies take responsibility for addictive apps?

To some extent, yes. Many apps are deliberately designed to keep us scrolling, with endless feeds and constant notifications, so it's not just a matter of individual willpower. Companies could add features like screen-time reminders or turning off autoplay by default. On the other hand, adults also need to take responsibility for their own choices. I'd say it should be shared, with extra protection for children.

CUE CARD 24

Describe a website or app you use often.

You should say:

- what it is
- how you found out about it
- what you use it for

and explain why you use it so often.

One-minute notes

budgeting app · recommended by colleague · tracks spending · categories, monthly limits · saving for Master's · eye-opening · less wasteful

Model answer

An app I use practically every day is a personal budgeting app on my phone. It's basically a digital notebook for money, where you record everything you earn and spend, and it turns that into simple charts.

I came across it about a year ago, when a colleague at the accounting firm noticed me complaining that my salary seemed to disappear by the twentieth of every month. She laughed and said that, for an accountant, I was pretty terrible at managing my own finances, which was fair enough. She showed me the app she used, and I downloaded it that same afternoon.

Mostly, I use it to log my daily expenses, which takes about ten seconds each time. Every chai, auto-rickshaw ride or online order goes in, and the app sorts it into categories like food, travel or shopping. I've also set monthly limits for each category, and it sends me a gentle warning when I'm getting close. On top of that, there's a savings goal feature, where I'm tracking how much I've put aside for my Master's abroad.

The reason it's become such a habit is that it was genuinely eye-opening. In the first month, I discovered I was spending a ridiculous amount on food delivery and snacks, almost as much as my phone bill and travel combined. Seeing that number made me cut back straight away. Now I save a much bigger chunk of my salary, and I feel far more in control.

Useful phrases

An app I use practically every day is... · I came across it when... · Mostly, I use it to... · The reason it's become such a habit is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Should children be taught how to manage money at school?

Definitely. Financial literacy is one of the most useful life skills, yet most schools barely touch on it. If teenagers learnt about budgeting, saving, interest and the risks of easy credit, they'd make fewer costly mistakes as adults. Some parents teach this at home, but many don't feel confident themselves. Even simple activities, like planning a pretend monthly budget, could make a lasting difference.

Are there any disadvantages to people doing everything through apps?

Yes, there are a few. One is privacy, since apps collect huge amounts of personal data, and people often don't know how it's used. Another is exclusion, because older or less tech-savvy people can struggle when services move online only. There's also the risk of overdependence; if the internet goes down, people can be stuck. So apps are convenient, but offline alternatives should still exist.



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CUE CARD 25

Describe an outdoor activity you did.

You should say:

- what the activity was
- where you did it
- who you did it with

and explain how you felt about it.

One-minute notes

trek up Pavagadh hill · near Champaner · college friends · started at dawn · steep steps, monkeys · rain halfway · view from top · exhausted, proud

Model answer

An outdoor activity that stands out is a trek I did up Pavagadh hill, which is about fifty kilometres from Vadodara, near the old city of Champaner. There's a famous temple at the top, and most visitors take the cable car, but we decided to walk the whole way.

I went with four friends from college, just after our final exams, as a sort of celebration. We hired a car, and to avoid the heat, we set off at around five in the morning. It was still dark when we started walking, and the path was lit by small shops selling tea, coconuts and flowers for the temple.

Halfway up, things got challenging. The steps became really steep and uneven, and my legs were burning. Then it started to drizzle, which made the stones slippery, and a group of cheeky monkeys snatched a packet of biscuits right out of my friend's hand. We were soaked and laughing so hard we had to stop for a while. A friendly old pilgrim who was easily seventy overtook us, which was slightly humiliating.

By the time we reached the top, I felt completely exhausted but also really proud of myself. The clouds had cleared, and we could see the green plains stretching for miles, with the ancient ruins of Champaner below. We sat there in silence for ages, just taking it in. It reminded me how rarely I switch off from screens and simply enjoy nature.

Useful phrases

An outdoor activity that stands out is... · We set off at... · Halfway up... · By the time we reached the top, I felt...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Do young people spend enough time outdoors nowadays?

Generally, I don't think they do. Many children and teenagers spend most of their free time on phones, games or tuition classes, especially in cities where open spaces are limited and traffic makes parents nervous. This can affect their physical health and even their mood. That said, outdoor activities like trekking and cycling are becoming popular among young adults, so the interest is there if opportunities are available.

What are the benefits of doing activities in nature?

There are physical benefits, obviously, like fitness and fresh air, but I think the mental benefits are just as important. Being surrounded by greenery seems to reduce stress and help people think more clearly. Group activities outdoors, such as camping, also build teamwork and friendships. And spending time in nature often makes people more aware of environmental issues, which encourages them to protect it.

CUE CARD 26

Describe a time you were late for something.

You should say:

- what you were late for
- why you were late
- what happened as a result

and explain how you felt about being late.

One-minute notes

friend's wedding ceremony · auto broke down · no phone signal · heavy traffic near ring road · missed varmala · friend teased · embarrassed, now leave early

Model answer

I'll never live down the time I was late for my best friend's wedding. Well, technically I made it to the wedding, but I missed one of the most important moments, the varmala, where the bride and groom exchange flower garlands.

Everything that could go wrong did. The ceremony was at a venue on the outskirts of Vadodara, and I'd planned to leave home with plenty of time. But first, my kurta needed ironing, because my mum spotted a crease she said was unacceptable. Then the auto-rickshaw I took broke down on the ring road, right in the middle of evening traffic. I stood there for twenty minutes trying to book another ride, but my phone had barely any signal.

By the time I arrived, sweaty and flustered, the garlands had already been exchanged and everyone was posing for photos. My friend spotted me from the stage and pulled a face, half annoyed and half amused. Later, during the dinner, he announced to our whole friendship group that I was the only person who'd managed to be late to the most planned event of his life. They still bring it up whenever we meet.

I felt absolutely mortified because he'd been there for every important moment in my life, and I'd missed his. Of course, he forgave me pretty quickly, but I learned my lesson. Now I always leave at least an hour early for anything important, even if it means sitting around waiting.

Useful phrases

I'll never live down the time I... · Everything that could go wrong did... · By the time I arrived... · I felt absolutely mortified because...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Is punctuality more important in some cultures than others?

I think so. In some countries, arriving even five minutes late for a meeting is considered quite rude. In India, people are often more relaxed about time for social events, and guests sometimes arrive an hour after a party starts. However, in professional settings, punctuality is becoming more important here too, especially in multinational companies. So it depends both on the culture and the context.

Why do some people struggle to be on time?

There are different reasons. Some people are simply poor at estimating how long things will take, so they always underestimate travel time. Others try to squeeze in one more task before leaving. In cities, unpredictable traffic also plays a big part. And for a few people, lateness may be a sign of stress or disorganisation in their lives. Planning ahead and building in extra time usually helps.



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CUE CARD 27

Describe a friend you have known for a long time.

You should say:

- who the friend is
- how you met
- what you do together

and explain why your friendship has lasted.

One-minute notes

Ritu · met in Class 3 · shared tiffin, same bench · now studies architecture in Ahmedabad · video calls, Navratri together · honest, loyal · accept each other

Model answer

One friend I've known almost my whole life is Ritu. We met when we were about eight, so we've been friends for well over fifteen years now, which is a little scary when I say it out loud.

We first met in Class 3, when our teacher made us share a bench because we both talked too much and she wanted to separate us from our other friends. That plan backfired completely. Within a week we were swapping tiffins every day, because she loved my mum's thepla and I was obsessed with her mum's poha. We ended up in the same class all the way through school.

These days we don't see each other as often as we'd like, because she's studying architecture in Ahmedabad. But we video call at least once a week, usually late at night, and talk about absolutely everything, from work stress to family dramas. Whenever she's back in Vadodara, we always go for pani puri at our favourite stall near our old school. And every Navratri, without fail, we dance garba together, just like we did as kids.

I think the reason we've stayed close is that we're completely honest with each other. She's the first person to tell me if I'm being silly, and I do the same for her. We've also accepted that we've both changed a lot, and we don't expect each other to stay the same. That acceptance, I think, is what keeps it going.

Useful phrases

One friend I've known almost my whole life is... · We first met when... · These days we... · I think the reason we've stayed close is...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Is it harder to maintain friendships as an adult?

I'd say it is, mainly because adult life is so busy. Work, family responsibilities and moving to new cities leave much less free time than in school, where you saw friends every day without planning it. Friendships now need deliberate effort, like scheduling calls. However, adult friendships can actually be deeper, because they're based on choice and shared values rather than just sitting in the same classroom.

Can social media help people keep friendships alive?

To some extent, yes. Social media and messaging make it easy to stay in touch with friends who've moved to other cities or countries, and to share small moments from daily life. Without it, many long-distance friendships would simply fade away. On the other hand, liking someone's photos isn't the same as a real conversation. So it's a useful tool, but it can't replace actually talking and meeting.

CUE CARD 28

Describe a piece of music that is special to you.

You should say:

- what kind of music it is
- when you first heard it
- how it makes you feel

and explain why it is special to you.

One-minute notes

old Gujarati folk song · grandmother sang it · while making rotis · slow, gentle · harmonium · reminds me of her · play it when homesick

Model answer

A piece of music that means a lot to me is an old Gujarati folk song, the kind that's been passed down through generations rather than written by anyone famous. It's quite slow and gentle, about a young woman waiting for her family to come and visit her in her new village after her wedding.

I first heard it when I was really small, maybe four or five, because my grandmother used to sing it while she was making rotis in the kitchen. She had a slightly husky voice, and she'd hum the melody between verses while rolling the dough. Later, when I was older, I heard a proper recording with a harmonium and a flute, but honestly, I still prefer her version.

Whenever I hear it, I feel calm and a bit emotional at the same time. The melody rises and falls in this very soothing way, almost like a lullaby. It instantly takes me back to that kitchen, with the smell of ghee and the sound of the pressure cooker in the background.

It's special because my grandmother passed away a few years ago, and this song is one of the strongest memories I have of her. I've saved a recording on my phone, and I tend to play it when I'm stressed or homesick, for instance when I'm travelling for work. I think that if I do go abroad to study, it'll be the first thing I listen to on the flight.

Useful phrases

A piece of music that means a lot to me is... · I first heard it... · Whenever I hear it... · It's special because...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do older people and younger people often like different kinds of music?

Music is closely tied to memories, so people tend to stay loyal to whatever they listened to in their teens and twenties. Older people associate certain songs with important times in their lives. Young people, meanwhile, are exposed to new styles through the internet and want music that reflects their own generation. That said, many families share favourites too; plenty of young Indians still love old film songs their parents played.

Is traditional music in danger of disappearing?

In some ways, yes. Many traditional folk forms were passed down orally, and when young people move to cities and stop learning them, they can fade away. However, technology is also helping to preserve them, since recordings can be shared widely online. Some young musicians are even mixing folk melodies with modern styles, which introduces them to new audiences. So with some effort, I think it can survive.

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CUE CARD 29

Describe a time you worked in a team.

You should say:

- what the task was
- who was in the team
- what your role was

and explain how you felt about working in that team.

One-minute notes

college business fest · food stall contest · five classmates · I did budget + sponsors · argued over theme · compromise · came second · learned to listen

Model answer

A team experience that taught me a lot was during the annual business fest at my college. Each class had to set up and run a food stall for one day, and the team with the highest profit and best customer feedback won a prize.

There were five of us in the team, all classmates from my BCom course. We had quite different personalities. One was super creative, one was very bossy, one was quiet but hard-working, and another was, frankly, more interested in eating the food than selling it.

My job was to handle the budget and find sponsors, which suited me since I love working with numbers. I visited a few local shops near the college and persuaded two of them to give us ingredients at a discount in exchange for advertising. Things got a bit heated when we had to decide on our theme, though. Half the team wanted fancy fusion snacks, and the other half wanted simple, cheap street food. We argued for two whole evenings. In the end, we compromised on street food with a creative twist, like cheese-filled dabeli.

On the whole, I felt it was a really positive experience, even though we came second rather than first. I learned that being right isn't always the most important thing; listening to others and finding a middle ground gets better results. It also showed me I actually enjoy taking responsibility, which has helped me at work since.

Useful phrases

A team experience that taught me a lot was... · My job was to... · Things got a bit heated when... · On the whole, I felt...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Why do employers value teamwork skills so much?

Because very few jobs today can be done entirely alone. Most projects involve people with different skills who need to communicate, share responsibilities and solve problems together. Someone who's technically brilliant but can't cooperate can actually slow a whole team down. Good team players also tend to handle conflict better and adapt to change. That's why interviews increasingly include group tasks or questions about past teamwork.

Are some people better suited to working alone?

Yes, I believe so. Some people concentrate much better without interruptions, and they may produce their best work independently, for example writers, researchers or programmers working on complex problems. Forcing them into constant group work can be frustrating and inefficient. However, even those people usually need some collaboration, like sharing ideas or getting feedback. So the ideal workplace allows for both quiet individual time and teamwork.

CUE CARD 30

Describe an environmental problem in your area.

You should say:

- what the problem is
- what causes it
- how it affects people

and explain what could be done to solve it.

One-minute notes

pollution in Vishwamitri river · sewage, plastic waste · construction on banks · smell, mosquitoes · flooding worse in monsoon · crocodiles affected · treatment plants, clean-up drives

Model answer

One issue that really worries me is the pollution of the Vishwamitri river, which flows right through Vadodara. Interestingly, it's known for having crocodiles living in it, right in the middle of a busy city, which is quite unusual.

The root cause is a mix of things. A lot of untreated sewage from parts of the city ends up flowing straight into the river. People also throw plastic bags, rubbish and religious offerings wrapped in plastic into it. On top of that, there's been a lot of construction along the riverbanks, which has narrowed the river in places and destroyed some of the natural vegetation.

The impact on daily life is quite noticeable. In some areas near the river, the smell can be awful, especially in summer, and stagnant water attracts mosquitoes, which spread diseases like dengue. During the monsoon, the narrowed river overflows more easily, so low-lying neighbourhoods get flooded. I remember a few years ago, crocodiles even turned up in residential streets during floods, which was terrifying for people living there. And of course, the river's wildlife suffers too.

In my view, the solution would involve both the government and ordinary citizens. The city needs more sewage treatment plants and stricter rules on construction near the banks. At the same time, residents should stop dumping waste, and regular clean-up drives, which some local groups already organise, could get more young people involved.

Useful phrases

One issue that really worries me is... · The root cause is... · The impact on daily life is... · In my view, the solution would involve...

Part 3 follow-up questions

Who should be responsible for protecting the environment, governments or individuals?

I think both have a role, but governments carry the bigger responsibility. Only they can pass laws, fund infrastructure like waste treatment, and regulate polluting industries, which have a far larger impact than any one person. Still, individuals matter too; if millions of people reduce plastic use or save water, it adds up. Ideally, government policies should make the environmentally friendly choice the easy choice for citizens.

Do you think people will change their lifestyles to help the environment?

Some people already are, especially younger generations who are more aware of climate change. You can see more people carrying cloth bags or choosing public transport. However, most people won't make big sacrifices unless the alternative is convenient and affordable. For instance, if electric scooters became cheaper than petrol ones, many would switch. So change will happen, but probably more through incentives than through good intentions alone.

Tip

Useful ways to extend a Part 3 answer: "One reason is...", "For example...", "On the other hand...", "That said, I think..."

Common mistake

Giving a one-line answer in Part 3. It is your chance to show range, so explain and extend every answer.



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