



The Perceived Challenges of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) and How to Support Their Transition Into the Classroom

December 4, 2021



Thank you for attending the IELTS USA Breakfast. Please grab something to eat and we will begin shortly. While you wait, please go to PolleEv.com/MistyWilson321.

Is this your first return to face-to-face conferences?

Yes

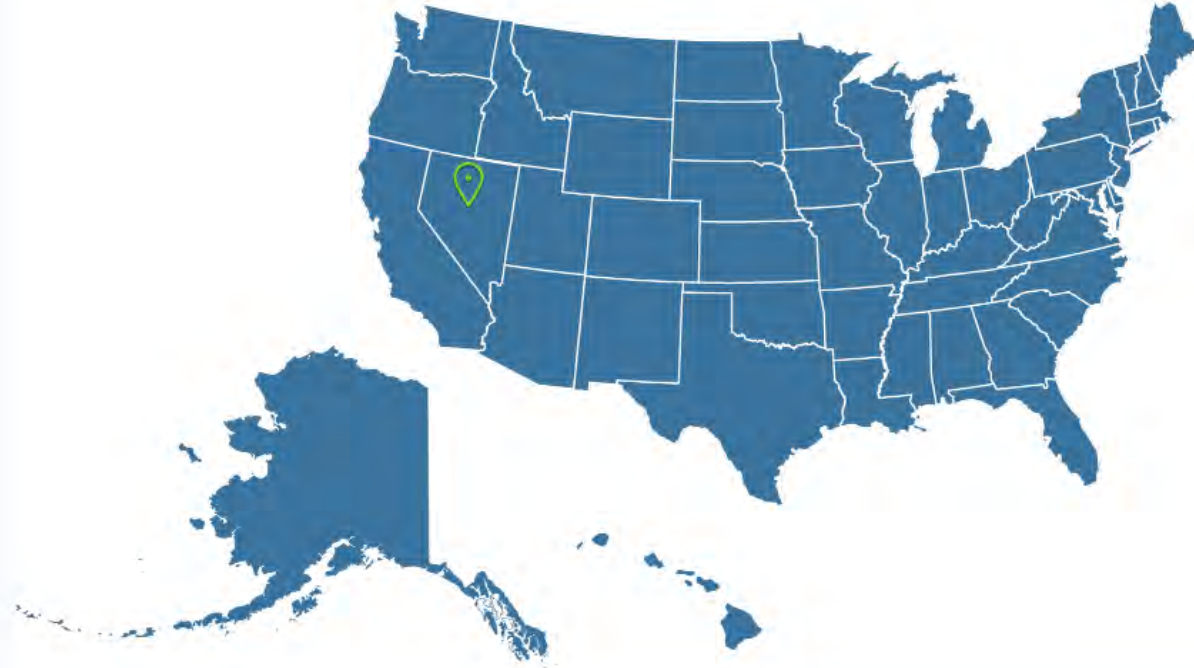
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No

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Where is your institution located?



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What are the biggest challenges ITAs face?

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Agenda

Perceived Challenges

Lehigh University's Approach

Next Steps With IELTS



IELTS USA

- Jointly owned by **three global partners**
- Manages **IELTS test administration** throughout the US
- **Supports** US recognizing organizations
- Offers **complimentary professional development** services for US college/university admissions, faculty, and ESL professionals
- Promotes IELTS-focused **research** within the US

Accepted by Over 3,400 US Institutions



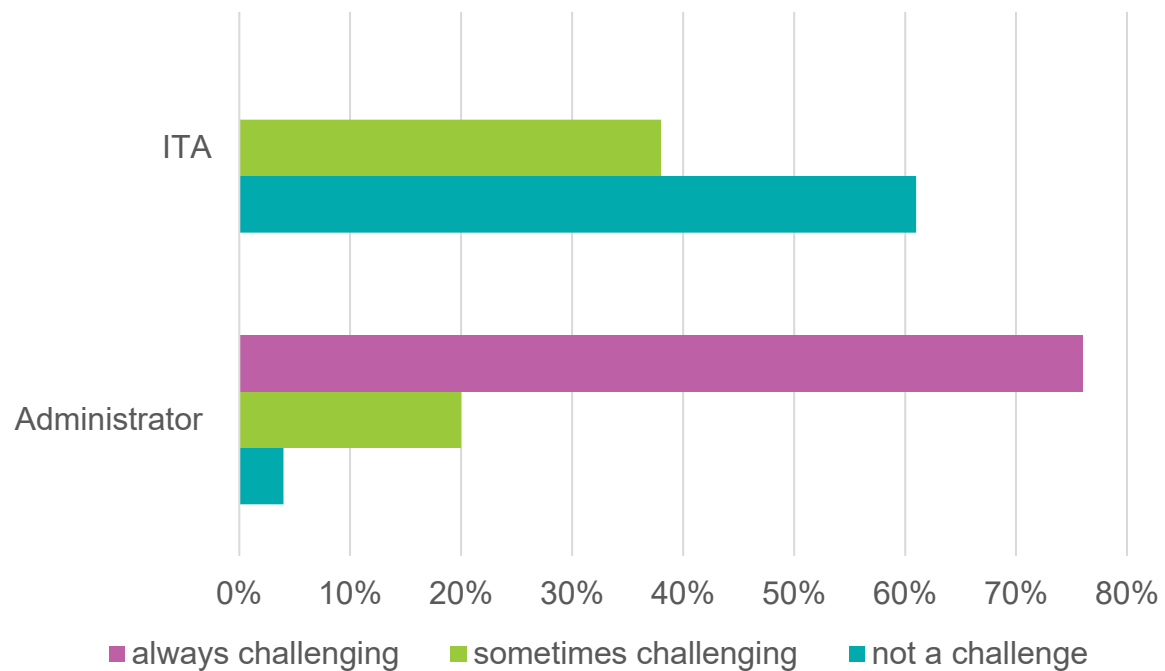
*Download updated US Recognition List from ielts.org/usa

Perceived Challenges and Opportunities

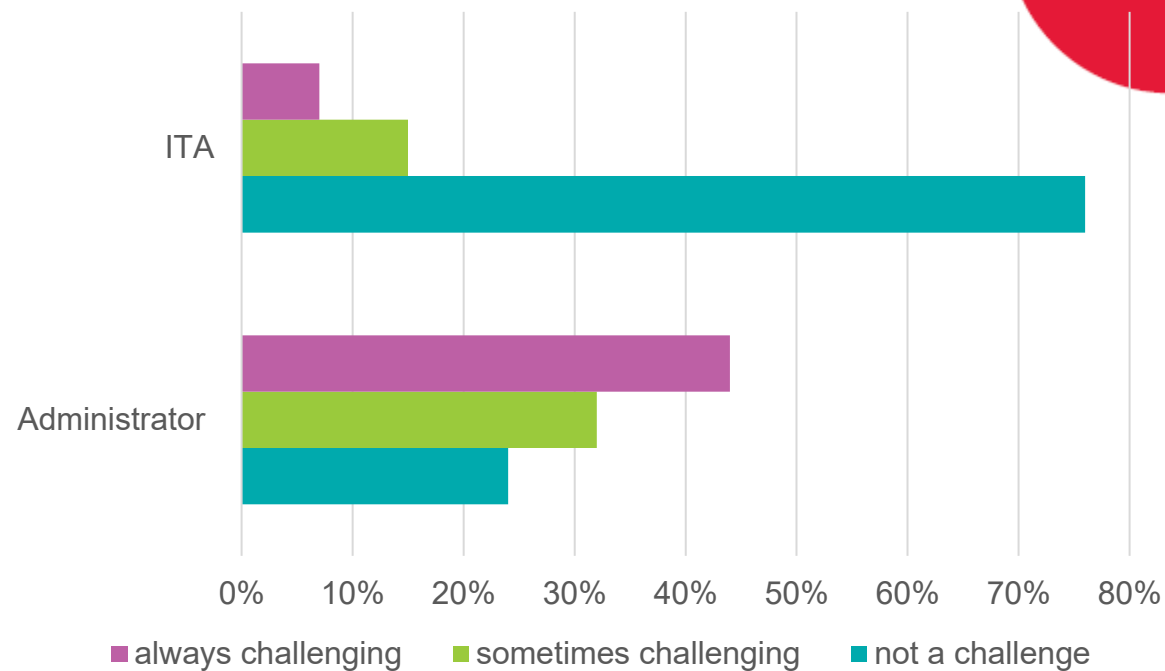
- 23 administrators and 13 ITAs responded
- How campuses define international teaching assistants:
 - By country
 - By undergraduate education
 - By first language
 - By passport
 - By visa classification
- Who funds ITA training (including workshops, coursework, and assessments)?
 - The English as a Second Language Program
 - Graduate College
 - The student's academic department
 - The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Department
 - International student fee

Perceptions of Challenges

Pronunciation

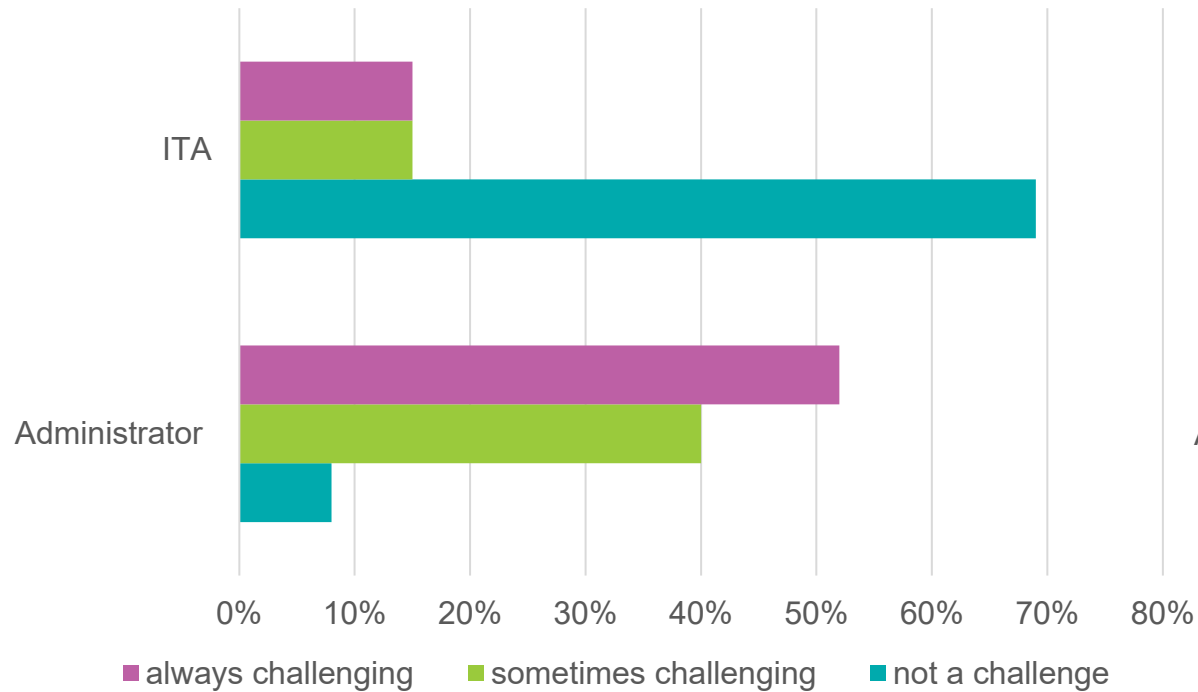


Listening

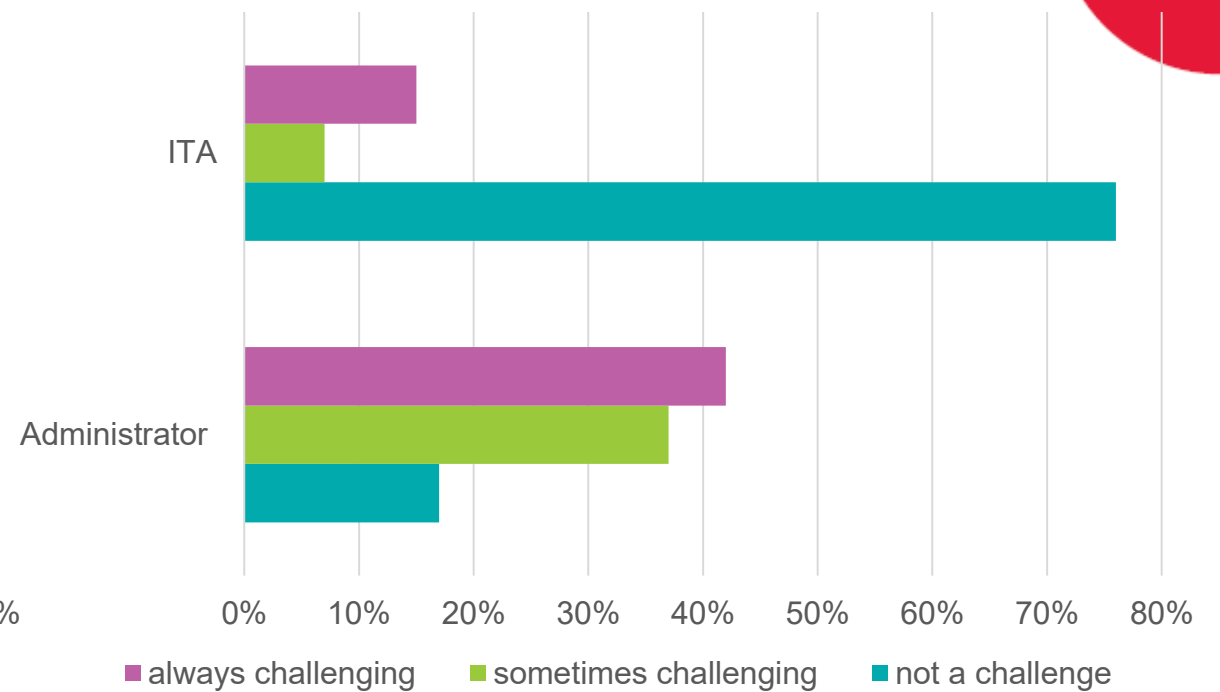


Perceptions of Challenges

Academic Culture



Interpersonal Relationships



Subskills

Administrator Perspective

Which English proficiency skills do you think are most important for ITAs to be successful?



ITA Perspective

What would you say is your greatest challenge as an ITA?



Other Challenges

Administrator Perspective

- Discrimination from undergrads
- Awareness of IHE organizational structures and policies
- Relationships with peers, faculty, and advisors
- Instructional practices (teacher-centered)
- Workload



Finding time to prioritize language work.



Limited access to speakers of North American English and opportunities to use it when their lab, their degree program, and their housing arrangements effectively segregate them into communities where their first language is the language of professional, academic, and interpersonal communication.



They work many hours in the lab in addition to studying and teaching. By law it should only be 20 hours a week but some work 40-60.

Other Challenges

ITA Perspective

- Time management/workload
- Low pay
- Professional vocabulary, idioms, cultural references
- Lack of feedback from students



Prepare [sic] well to the lecture is always taking time and I go beyond the 20 hours per week to help the students.



Not being paid enough to live comfortably.



Students may not understand me but they do not tell me.

COVID-19 Related Challenges

Administrator Perspective

- Online teaching
- Assessing ITAs pre-arrival
- Visas, travel, and time differences
- Lack of opportunities for ITAs to speak English
- Transcription functions with accents
- Projecting voices with masks on



I would say teaching online was a big challenge for ITAs and there wasn't much done to support them in that transition/task.



Many students were still in their home countries, in their parents' homes! No opportunities to speak English.



[ITAs] had fewer language immersion experiences than in a normal year, and the social distancing resulted in stagnation or even regression in spoken English proficiency.

COVID-19 Related Challenges

ITA Perspective

- Teaching online
- Communicating with masks on
- Workload
- How to deal with reporting absences, reporting late submissions

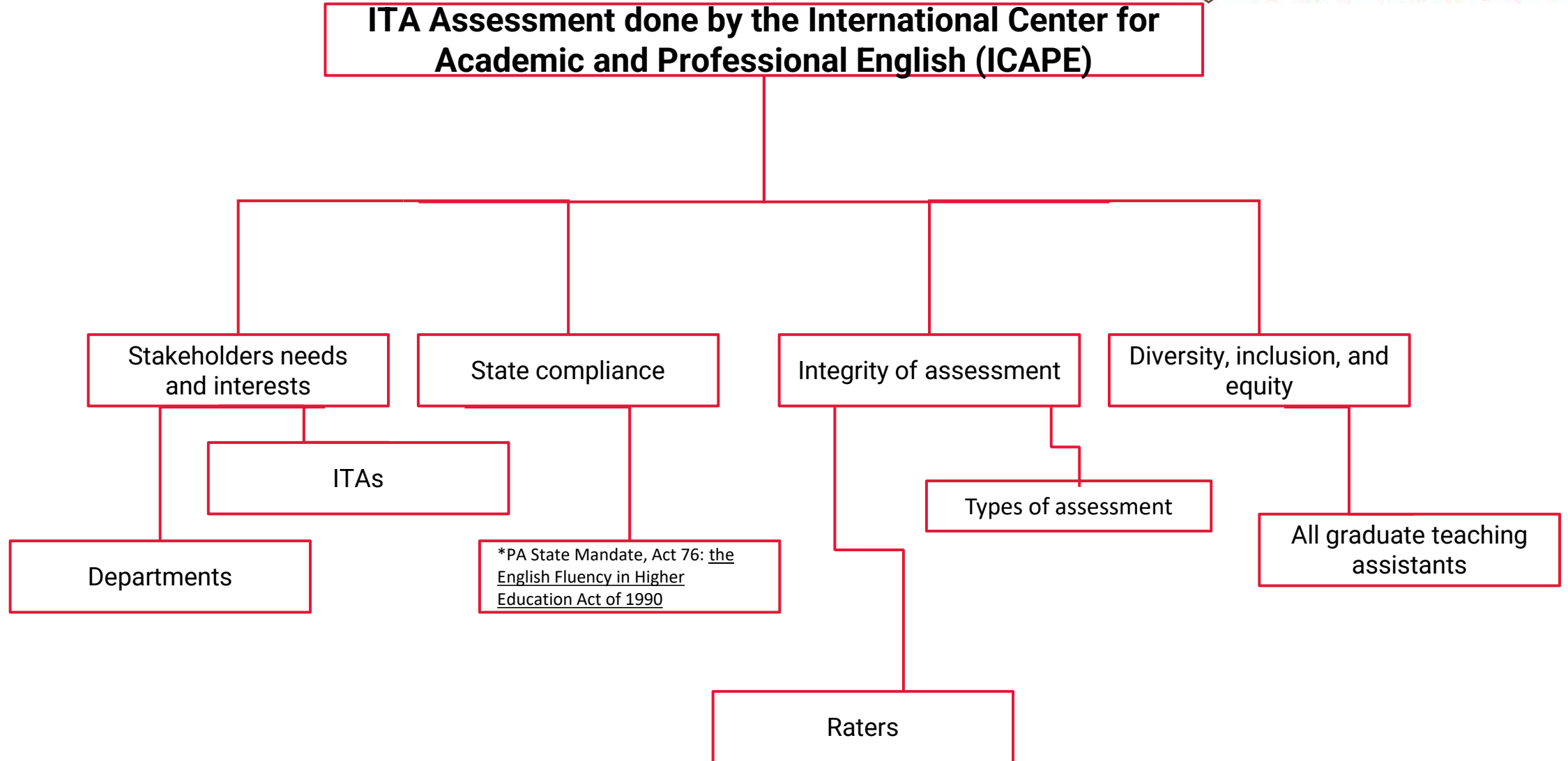
“ *More work for the same the same pay.* ”

“ *The transition from the traditional classrooms to virtual teaching.* ”

“ *Using mask limits communication in terms of hearing speaker's voice and understanding some words.* ”

Lehigh University's Approach to ITA Transition

Assessment of ITAs



Pre-Assessment



- Applicant graduate teaching assistants regardless of cultural/linguistic background, national citizenship or other social classification or identity are pre-screened using standard criteria for assessment.
 - previous English language education
 - years successfully completed in higher education in an English-dominant context
 - standardized English language test scores
 - professional peer-reviewed publications and presentations in English in a specific academic discipline
 - Lehigh department interviews for admissions
- ICAPE determines whether or not further assessment is required.
 - No further assessment
 - Test of Pedagogical Speaking Skills (TOPSS)
 - Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)

Support



- ICAPE Workshops
 - Asking and Answering Questions in the Classroom: Language Skills and Compensatory Strategies for ITAs
 - Classroom Communication for ITAs
 - Leading a Lab: Clearly Articulating Instructions and Rules for ITAs
 - Presenting a Visual in the Classroom: Language Skills and Compensatory Strategies for ITAs
 - Pronunciation Brush Up for ITAs
 - TOPSS Preparation Workshop
- Courses
 - Advanced Presentation Skills for Teaching Assistants
 - Intelligibility and Comprehensibility
 - Advanced Academic Speaking
- Graduate Life and CITL Training and Workshops
 - Teacher Assistant training
 - Lab Safety Training
 - Teacher Development Program for Graduate Students
 - Symposium on Teaching and Learning

Challenges

- Discrimination and racism
- American culture
- Funding
- Writing skills




What's Next?

- More collaboration across the institution
- Focus groups with ITAs
- Develop more workshops





Next Steps With IELTS



**What do you think is the
most important step
your institution can take
to ensure ITAs' success?**

IELTS Academic

IELTS Academic

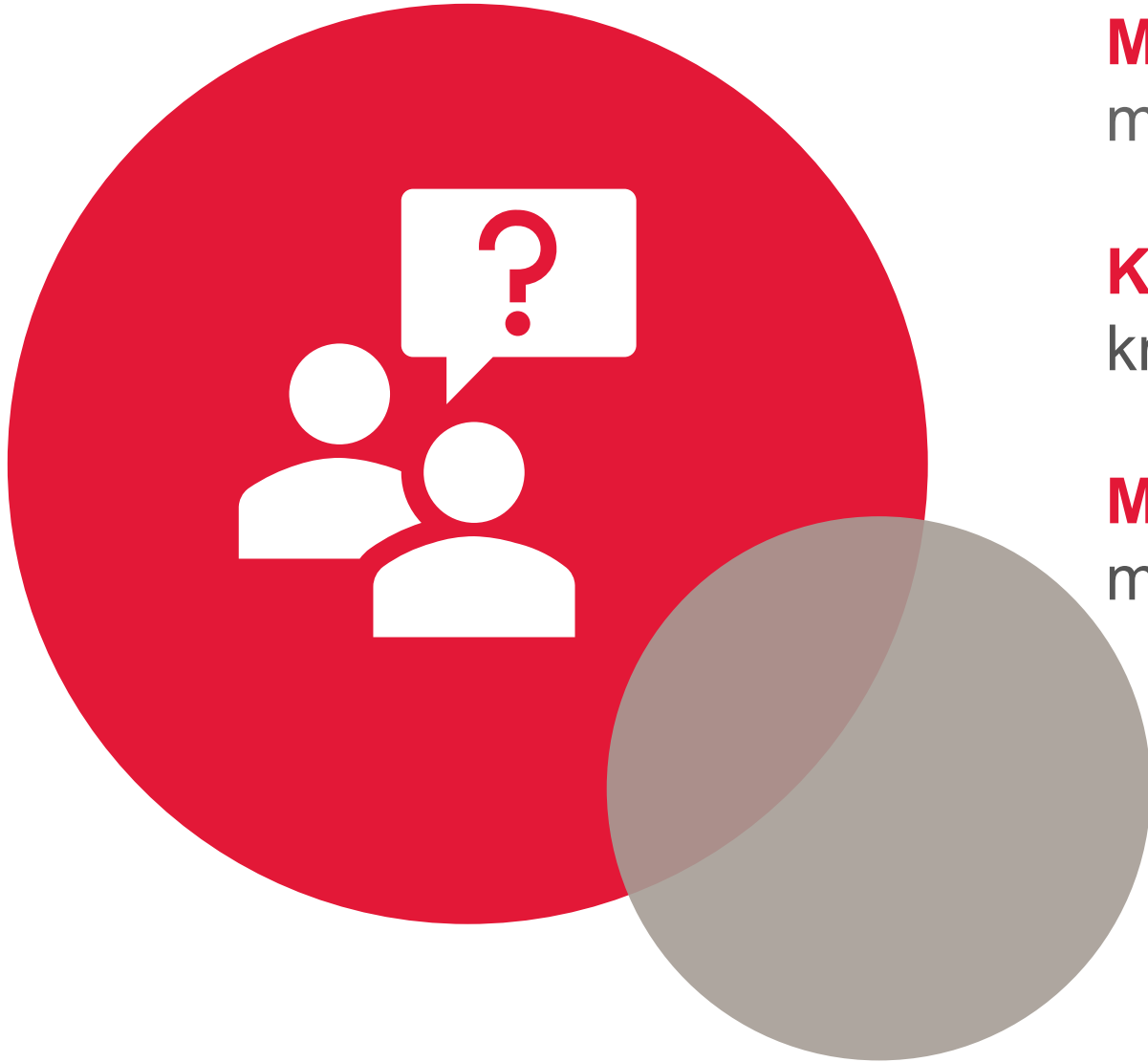
Listening (30 minutes)
4 sections, 40 questions

Reading (60 minutes)
3 passages, 40 questions

Writing (60 minutes)
2 tasks, 150 & 250 words

Speaking (11-14 minutes)
3 parts, face-to-face

9	Expert user
8	Very good user
7	Good user
6	Competent user
5	Modest user
4	Limited user
3	Extremely limited user
2	Intermittent user
1	Non user



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