International Phonetic Association

English dictation

- **Sample dictation passage**

  1 ˈwɒt əbaʊt ˈɡəʊɪŋ tə ˈriːdʒn̩ts ˈpɑːk | ənd ˈhævɪŋ ə ˈlʊk
  ə? ðə ˈsprɪŋ ˈflaʊəz |

  2 bɪfɔː ðeɪ ˈɔːl ɡep ˈbləʊn əˈweɪ | baɪ ðɪs ˈhɒrəbl̩ ˈwɪnd ||

  3 ðeɪ seɪ ðə ˈtjuːlɪps ə mæɡˈnɪfɪsn̩? ˈðɪʃ jɜː ||

  4 aɪv ˈdʒʌs ɡɒ? tə ˈtʃeɪndʒ maɪ ˈlaɪbri bʊks |

  5 ən aɪ ˈwɒntə ɡəʊ tə ðə delikəˈtesn̩ ʃɒp ˈneks ˈdɔː ||

  6 ðeɪv ɡɒt ə ˈrɑːðə naɪs ˈtʃiːz ðeə | ˈkʌvəd ɪŋ ˈɡreɪp pɪps ||

  7 ˈɪf aɪ get ə ˈpækɪt ə ˈbɪskɪts əz ˈwel | wi ˈmaɪp phæps
  ˈsɪt ɪn nə ˈpɑːk |

  8 əm ˈmeɪk ə lɪtl̩ ˈpɪknɪk ˈɒv ɪt ||

  9 ɔː wʊdʒʊ ˈrɑːðə ɡəʊ ˈhəʊm | ən ˈsɪ? baɪ ðə ˈfaə ||

- **Commentary and instructions to candidates**

  Candidates are instructed that the text is to be transcribed *phonetically*.

  The term phonetically, as used in the instructions here, does **not** mean inclusion of diacritics (marking aspiration, dark-l, etc.), or the use of specifically phonetic symbols (such as the inverted [ɹ]). It means that the text can include evidence of processes which bring about pronunciations that differ from the citation form of a word, as found in the pronouncing dictionary.

  For example, the examiner may include instances of *t-glottalling, smoothing, assimilation, elision,* etc. Among others, the sample below includes:

  t-glottalling   *at the*   pronounced here   ə? ðə

	got to	gɒʔ tə
smoothing	*fire*	faə
assimilation	*get blown*	gep ˈbləʊn
	this year	ˈðɪʃ jɜː
	in grape	ɪŋ ˈgreɪp
	in the	ɪn nə
	would you	wʊdʒʊ
elision	*just got*	dʒʌs gɒʔ
	library	ˈlaɪbri
	of biscuits	ə ˈbɪskɪts
	perhaps	phæps (chosen here rather than the more common **præps,** testing candidates' phonetic awareness)

The transcription style is essentially a broad/phonemic transcription and will also include an indication of rhythmic or sentence stress. (You should not mark intonation.)

Candidates are expected to record everything as pronounced by the examiner.

- **The dictation process**

The examiner first dictates the whole passage to familiarize the candidates with the contents. S/he then dictates it again, a 'chunk' at a time (see numbered sections in the passage above), repeating each chunk six times, with plenty of time between repetitions. Finally, after allowing candidates a couple of minutes to check their work, s/he dictates the whole passage once more.

Examiners will be sensitive to ambient noise, disturbances, and to the examination room environment (as affecting audibility and visibility).

The passage is dictated in Modern Received Pronunciation.

- **Choice of symbols**

No particular symbol set is prescribed, but the set selected must use the IPA alphabet. In practice most candidates use the notation found in one of the following pronouncing dictionaries:

WELLS, J.C. 2008, 3rd edition. *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*. Longman: London.

JONES, Daniel. 2011, 18th edition. *Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary with CD-ROM*. Edited by Peter Roach, Jane Setter, and John Esling. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Alternatively, a candidate might use the slightly different system of notation found in:

CRUTTENDEN, A. (Ed.) 2014, 8th edition. *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*. Routledge: London.

Whichever system is selected, it must be used consistently. It is not acceptable to use more than one way of representing a single sound. For example, the vowel in *cat* must be represented throughout as either **æ** (following WELLS 2008 and JONES 2011) or as **a** (following CRUTTENDEN 2014) – you must not alternate between these two symbols.

- **How are dictations evaluated?**

  As with transcription marking, the IPA employs negative marking, deducting marks from a pool of 60 (for native speakers of English) and 65 for non-native speakers (who are given an additional 5 error allowance). The rule of thumb is to deduct one point for a full segmental error. Such errors may involve:

  o omission of an essential segment such as the final **m** of *and* dictated as **əm** or the **d** of *change* dictated as **tʃeɪndʒ**, etc.

  o insertion of an additional and incorrect segment, such as a second **t** in *want to* *ˈwɒnt tə dictated as ˈwɒntə, or **ə** in *perhaps* *pəhæps dictated as **phæps**, etc.

  o using the wrong symbol to represent a particular sound such as *sh for ʃ *shop* ʃɒp or *s for **z** for in *cheese* **tʃiːz**, or *oʊ for **əʊ** in MRP *home* **həʊm**, etc.

  Other errors, such as stress errors result in deduction of half a point, for example:

  o misplaced stresses such as *ˈmægnɪfɪsn̩ʔ for *magnificent* pronounced **mægˈnɪfɪsn̩ʔ, *tjuːˈlɪps** for *tulips* pronounced ˈtjuːlɪps, etc.

  o Omission of essential stresses, such as *ˈriːdʒn̩ts pɑːk for *Regent's Park* pronounced ˈriːdʒn̩ts ˈpɑːk, etc.

  o Insertion of inappropriate stresses such as *ˈdelikəˈtesn̩ for *delicatessen* pronounced **delikəˈtesn̩**, etc.

Sometimes, the misplacement of stresses in intonational phrases that results in the wrong sentence stress will incur two penalties. In the IP *covered in grape pips* pronounced ˈkʌvəd ɪŋ ˈgreɪp pɪps ‖ for example, the transcription *ˈkʌvəd

ɪŋ ɡreɪp ˈpɪps || has a stress missing on *grapes* but an additional stress on *pips*. Each of these is a separate mistake and loses half a mark.

Most errors are random errors of this kind and occur just once or twice in a given transcription. Sometimes, however, transcriptions contain what are called "repeated errors". This means that every instance of a particular sound is transcribed, systematically, using the same incorrect symbol. Provided this is consistent throughout, only 2 points will be deducted regardless of whether there are ten tokens of the affected sound or just two or three of them. For more information on repeated errors, see the advice on how to write a phonemic transcription – Advice on Q1.

Good practice also plays a part in transcribing from dictation. We conventionally chunk texts into intonational phrases (IPs), using minor (|) and major (||) boundaries to reflect the non-terminal or terminal nature of the intonation tune. If you detect these boundaries as you listen to a dictation, you should insert them. This shows the examiner your auditory awareness of the spoken melody. However, because the IPA does not require you to include intonation in these dictations, you are not penalized when the boundaries are wrong. Please note, though, that IP boundaries are vertical bar lines (like those seen on a musical stave), they must not slant over.

The English dictation contributes a maximum of 30 marks to a candidate's overall mark. In evaluating dictations, examiners rely on their experience and knowledge. Dictations are evaluated by two examiners independently who later meet to discuss their decisions and agree an appropriate score. The score for the dictation is achieved by deducting agreed errors from the allowance of 60 or 65 points (see above) and then weighting the score out of 30.

To ensure fairness, both examiners are present during this practical part of the examination. One conducts the exam while the other listens and makes notes.