

IELTS Vocabulary Topics

Environment Word List

Word/phrase	Meaning	Example
Climate change	The change in global weather patterns.	Increases in the world's temperature have contributed to climate change.
Global warming	The heating up of the world's climate.	The average global temperature has rapidly increased due to global warming.
Extreme weather	Unusual, unexpected, or unseasonal weather patterns.	Extreme weather such a heat waves are becoming more regular.
Polar ice caps	High altitude regions that are covered by snow and ice.	The Earth's polar ice caps are melting because of global warming and climate change.
Deforestation	The loss of the Earth's forest regions.	Deforestation has increased mainly because of the demand for agricultural land.
Pollution	The introduction of contaminants into the environment.	A major source of pollution in cities is exhaust fumes from vehicles.
Greenhouse effect	The process in which gasses in the Earth's atmosphere trap the heat from the sun.	One of the main causes of the greenhouse effect is the burning of fossil fuels.
Fossil fuel	Hydrocarbons, found underground, made from decomposed animals and plants.	Fossil fuels such as oil and gas are burned to produce energy.
Conservation	Trying to protect or preserve something.	The conservation of rainforests from logging is a priority amongst environmentalists.
Rainforest	An area of usually evergreen trees that gets a large amount of rain.	Rainforests contain a great variety of animal species and vegetation.
Environmentalist	Someone who is concerned about the Earth's environment and campaigns to protect it.	Young people are increasingly becoming environmentalists in reaction to the climate crisis.
Endangered species	A species that is likely to become extinct in the near future.	Because of habitat loss and poaching, the gorilla is now an endangered species.
Extinct	To no longer exist/live.	Dinosaurs went extinct about 65 million years ago.
Poaching	The illegal hunting and killing of animals.	Poaching of tigers for use in traditional medicine is illegal.
Habitat loss	The process where a region can no longer sustain native species.	Mining has resulted in the habitat loss for many rainforest species.
Single use plastic	Plastic items that are used once then thrown away.	Single use plastic straws and water bottles are a major cause of marine pollution.

Green belt	An area of countryside around a city or town where building is not allowed.	The local authority refused permission to build a shopping mall on the green belt.
Renewable energy	Energy that is produced from natural sources such as the sun or wind.	The government has invested heavily in renewable energy and plans to build a solar power plant.
Solar power	Electricity produced from the sun's energy.	Every new house must have 30% of its energy generated through solar power.
Pesticide	Chemicals used to kill insects, wild plants.	The use of pesticides in agriculture increases productivity but damages the environment.
Organic	Food and plants produced naturally without the use of chemicals.	Organic vegetables usually cost more but the price has been decreasing recently.
Water cycle	The natural process of water moving in the earth and atmosphere.	The water cycle is an ongoing process.
Recycling	The process of converting waste into new products.	Nowadays, the recycling of glass is widespread.
Overpopulation	When the population of a species becomes too large to be sustained by the environment.	Human overpopulation of the Earth is believed by many to be the main cause of the climate crisis.
Soil erosion	The loss of soil (ground) by rain and wind.	Deforestation has led to soil erosion in many parts of the world.
Landfills	Areas where waste is buried in the ground.	Many countries still dispose of domestic waste in landfill sites.
Famine	A severe shortage of food in a certain area.	The climate crisis has resulted in certain regions suffering from famine.
Drought	A severe shortage of water in a certain area.	In certain regions there hasn't been rainfall in several years which has caused drought.
Acid rain	Rain that contains a high level of acid.	Acid rain has been shown to damage forests.

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Environment Idioms

A drop in the ocean

Meaning: An amount that is so small it makes very little difference.

Example: Our target is to raise \$20,000 for charity so your donation of \$5 is *a drop in the ocean*.

A storm in a teacup

Meaning: To worry and get upset about something that is not important.

Example: Making an issue about her behavior is *a storm in a teacup*. She was only following company procedure.

Answer the call of nature

Meaning: To go to the toilet.

Example: Excuse me for a moment I need to *answer the call of nature*. Carry on with the meeting without me.

Feel under the weather

Meaning: To feel unwell or ill.

Example: I *feel under the weather* today. I think I ate something last night that didn't agree with me.

A ray of sunshine

Meaning: Something that brings happiness.

Example: News of a salary increase was *a ray of sunshine* for the department after disappointing sales figures.

Can't see the wood for the trees

Meaning: To focus too much on small details rather than see the whole picture.

Example: He's so involved in the costs of the project that he *can't see the wood for the trees*. He should focus on the positive effects it will have.

Reach for the stars

Meaning: To try to achieve something very challenging.

Example: My IELTS goal is band 8.0. I know it's *reaching for the stars*, but I love a worthy challenge!

In deep water

Meaning: To be in trouble or in a difficult situation.

Example: She got *in deep water* with her parents when she failed the mid-course college exams.

Barking up the wrong tree

Meaning: To be wrong about how to achieve something or the reason for something.

Example: He thinks he will get a promotion if he has a close relationship with the boss but he's *barking up the wrong tree*.

Paper tiger

Meaning: Something or someone that appears very strong but is actually weak.

Example: He claimed he would easily win the boxing match but he's *a paper tiger*. He got knocked out after a minute.

All at sea

Meaning: To feel confused about something and not sure what to do.

Example: Can you help me with this? I'm *all at sea* with this crossword puzzle. It's too difficult.