

Weather conditions in different countries by Mike Furber

Age: Teenagers / Adults
Level: Intermediate +
Time: 60 minutes
Objective: to develop weather vocabulary; to develop IELTS Reading exam strategies (skimming, scanning, making inferences); to develop fluent speaking skills by describing different weather conditions
Key skills: reading, speaking
Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student, pictures of extreme weather conditions

Procedure

- Show the class some pictures of extreme weather conditions and elicit some relevant vocabulary – What's happening? How would the extreme weather make students feel? etc.
- Hand out the worksheet. Put students in pairs or groups, preferably of mixed nationality, to discuss the lead-in questions. Manage open-class feedback on what students learnt about the weather in each other's countries, focusing on any interesting examples.
- Learners complete the vocabulary section. They can use dictionaries. Circulate, helping and supporting learners. Elicit some definitions of the words from the whole class.

Key:

flood (n, v)
drought (n)
heatwave (n)
icy (adj)
warm (adj, v)
mild (adj)
drizzle (n, v)
mist (n, v)
fog (n, v)
hail (n, v)
sleet (n, v)
scorching (adj)
cloudy (adj)
thunder (n, v)
lightning (n, adj)
storm (n, v)
rainfall (n)

- Go through the first exam tip with the whole class. Elicit any further strategies learners have for reading exams.
- Remind students of the exam tip and tell them they now have a chance to practise it. Have them read the text and questions quickly for gist, underlining key words in both and noticing any synonyms.
- Learners focus on task 1, matching the headings and paragraphs, and decide on their answers.
- Learners compare answers with a partner, justifying why they chose each answer with evidence from the text. Then, conduct open-class feedback on the answers, eliciting justification of both correct and incorrect answers from learners – for example, 'Why did you choose that answer?' 'Where does it say that?' 'Has anyone got a different answer?' Don't just say 'That's right' or 'That's wrong' – make learners really engage with the text.

Key:

paragraph	heading
A	v
B	ii
C	vi
D	i
E	vii
F	viii
G	iii

Heading iv is not needed.

- Learners focus on task 2. They read the second exam tip and answer the yes/no/not given questions, and then discuss their answers in pairs or groups, once again justifying answers with reference to the text. Then, repeat the procedure from the previous open-class feedback.
- Key:**
- No
 - Yes
 - Yes
 - Yes
 - Not given
- Have pairs of students discuss the questions at the end of the worksheet, giving their reactions to some of the ideas in the text. Finish with an open-class discussion.

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Lead-in

Discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups.

1. What's the weather like where you come from?
2. Are there distinct seasons with different types of weather?
3. What things do you like doing in those different seasons?
4. Are there any extreme weather conditions in your country that cause problems? What are they, and what problems do they cause? How do people solve these problems?

Weather vocabulary

Check these words in a dictionary. Which are nouns, which are adjectives and which are verbs? Some can be more than one of these.

word	definition	noun	adjective	verb
flood				
drought				
heatwave				
icy				
warm				
mild				
drizzle				
mist				
fog				
hail				
sleet				
scorching				
cloudy				
thunder				
lightning				
storm				
rainfall				

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Responses to extreme weather conditions in different countries

1. Read the text on the next page and match each heading with the correct paragraph. The first answer is given for you, and there is also one answer you don't need.

List of headings

- i Technology helping to keep people safe
- ii An unfair comparison
- iii Fail to prepare, prepare to fail
- iv A response that came too late
- v Cold weather causing transport problems – *paragraph A*
- vi A country with a variety of extreme weather needs to be prepared
- vii Prevention is better than cure
- viii Creating a problem through intelligent design

IELTS Reading exam tip

Underline or highlight key words in the texts and the questions. Try to match synonyms or similar ideas in the text and questions to find the answers.

2. Yes/No/Not given questions

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the text?

Write:

YES if the statement agrees with the information

NO if the statement contradicts the information

NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

IELTS Reading exam tip

The 'not given' answer causes many candidates to make mistakes, as the statements might be implied but not actually stated in the text. Be sure of what the author means, and don't just choose your answer on the basis of what topics are mentioned.

1. Britain has colder winters than Norway and Canada.
2. Britain spends less on colder weather preparation than Scandinavian countries.
3. Ethiopia prepares for drought emergencies by monitoring wildlife.
4. China has less effective earthquake preparation than Japan.
5. The UK requires its citizens to insulate their homes.

Discussion

Which countries mentioned in the article do you think are best prepared for extreme weather conditions?

Do you think your country is well-prepared for its weather conditions? Why? Why not? How could it improve its preparations?

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- A. v In Great Britain, people have long joked that trivial seasonal conditions such as 'leaves on the line' or a light drizzle have brought transport chaos to the rail network and misery to commuters. But the case in October 2009 of the Eurostar trains being suspended because of the 'wrong type of snow getting into the engine' suggests that there is truth to the stereotype that Britain is not adequately prepared for adverse weather conditions when compared with other countries.
- B. ___ However, a 2011 parliamentary select committee reporting on 'Keeping the UK moving: the impact on transport of the winter' found that Britons often compare their country's response to cold weather conditions such as snow with that of countries like Canada and Norway where there are undoubtedly more severe weather conditions. The committee went on to make the point that in countries with more severe winter conditions, like Canada and Scandinavian countries, it is more cost-effective to have a higher level of preparedness, such as the provision of snow chains or different types of tyres for varying types of weather. European countries with more comparable climates to the UK were found to experience similar transportation issues in the winter.
- C. ___ In countries with more extreme weather conditions, preparedness for these conditions becomes a matter of urgency for the local population. For example, the USA is hit each year with over 10,000 thunderstorms, 2,500 floods, 1,000 tornadoes and on average two land-falling hurricanes, according to the United States Department of Commerce. As a result, the government department has set up its 'Storm ready' programme, which encourages the national standardization of early-response warnings, holds emergency exercise drills and produces guidelines for citizens to follow in extreme weather conditions.
- D. ___ In Japan, school children might experience earthquake simulation devices, which are special rooms that shake as they would in a serious earthquake, supporting the educational drills and procedures that prepare Japanese citizens for an earthquake. Unlike Haiti and China, which have also recently experienced earthquakes, stringent Japanese buildings codes served to minimize fatalities by constructing buildings shorter and stouter than in other countries, and building high-rise blocks on top of 'isolation pads' and 'energy dissipation units', which dampen the shock from an earthquake. Older buildings without these pads were found to have collapsed more in the 2011 earthquake than the newer ones that had them.
- E. ___ In countries that suffer from drought, such as Ethiopia, levels of preparedness can prevent an emergency situation from developing into the tragic occurrence of a large-scale famine. In the past, the response of the international community consisted of food and financial aid once a famine was already in progress. However, since 2000, Ethiopia has established the National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Fund (NDPPF), as a non-food emergency intervention mechanism for rapid response, to compliment the Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR). The response is now coordinated between a variety of agencies to ensure that levels of rainfall/water stocking ratios are monitored, and bird behaviour and livestock conditions are observed as indicators of famine likelihood, triggering response mechanisms such as external water provision paid for by an emergency fund. While weather conditions in this region will always contain the threat of drought, this coordinated response serves to minimize the potential for large-scale tragedies such as the 1984 famine.
- F. ___ In many countries, preparations for the most extreme weather conditions can cause problems when different conditions prevail. For example, British houses are in general designed to keep the occupants warm during the winter. Government initiatives help householders to insulate their houses to hold in the heat, and most householders invest in thick carpets to seal in warmth. However, in the relatively infrequent case of a British heatwave, such provisions turn homes into unbearable ovens. In Spain, the reverse is true, with many homes featuring cooling tiled flooring that becomes unhelpful in the case of a freezing winter.
- G. ___ While climate-change experts predict more extreme and unstable weather conditions around the world, it remains more important than ever that governments and other agencies have strategies in place to minimize threats and dangers through coordinated preparedness. In developed countries and those used to such emergencies, this process is already clearly observable. However, there have been a number of tragic occurrences in developing countries that demonstrate that a failure to prepare for extreme weather conditions puts the lives of citizens in danger. 'Be prepared' must be the clear message.