

IELTS vocabulary for society and culture

Words for traditions, migration and social groups from passages on dying languages and an ageing population, with phrases like 'walks of life' and 'face-to-face contact' from our Speaking and Writing answers.

Words

heritage /'herɪtɪdʒ/ (noun, B2) history, buildings and traditions passed down from the past

And it is the conservation of the world's cultural heritage against looting and careless harm.

indigenous /ɪn'dɪdʒənəs/ (adjective, C1) living in a place from the earliest times

The first stage was achieved by Neolithic agrarians who were likely to have been indigenous to the British Isles.

ritual /'rɪtʃuəl/ (noun, B2) a ceremony with actions always done the same way

Alternatively, the carving may have been carried out during a Bronze or Iron Age ritual.

custom /'kʌstəm/ (noun, B2) a traditional way of behaving in a society

At the same time, they might help to preserve local customs, slowing the spread of habits associated with international English, such as its readiness to get on first-name terms.

civilisation /ˌsɪvəlaɪ'zeɪʃn/ (noun, B2) a society with its own culture and way of life

Although piracy in the Mediterranean is first recorded in ancient Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep III (c 1390-1353 BCE), it is reasonable to assume it predated this powerful civilisation.

inhabitant /ɪn'hæbɪtənt/ (noun, B2) a person or animal that lives in a place

In the ancient times, the inhabitants of these areas relied heavily on marine resources, including fish and salt.

demographic /ˌdema'græfɪk/ (adjective, C1) relating to a population's size, age and other features

About three out of four families in Kenya depend on wood or charcoal to cook their daily meals, and the rate is even higher in rural areas, Kenya's latest demographic and health survey shows.

elderly /'eldəli/ (adjective, B1) old (a polite word)

Elderly people are growing healthier, happier and more independent, say American scientists.

ethical /'eθɪkl/ (adjective, B2) relating to what is morally right or wrong

Knauf has observed that individuals in such groups don't accumulate property or possessions and have an ethical obligation to share everything.

prejudice /'predʒʊdɪs/ (noun, C1) an unfair opinion formed without good reason or knowledge

In order to succeed, Whaley needs to get the local people on board, and that has meant overcoming local prejudices.

identity /aɪ'dentəti/ (noun, B2) who a person is; a sense of belonging to a group

Neuroscience has revealed which brain circuits are responsible for functions like understanding what other people think, empathy, fairness, and social identity.

minority /maɪ'nɒrəti/ (noun, B2) a smaller group that is different from the rest

Quite often, governments try to kill off a minority language by banning its use in public or discouraging its use in schools, all to promote national unity.

migration /maɪ'greɪʃn/ (noun, B2) moving from one place to live in another

They are so poor they have to live in slums and, as a result of migration, they may speak languages that are different from the regional language.

immigrant /'ɪmɪgrənt/ (noun, B2) a person who comes to live permanently in a new country

On a societal level, one could even imagine that a lack of conversational flow may hamper the integration of immigrants who have not completely mastered the language of their new country yet.

status /'stetəs/ (noun, B2) social or professional position compared with others

Some cultural traditions demand solemn respect for academic status, for example, and it is only polite to respect this.

poverty /'pɒvəti/ (noun, B2) the state of being very poor

One response to the boycott movement has been the argument for the vital role palm oil plays in lifting many millions of people in the developing world out of poverty.

welfare /'welfeə/ (noun, C1) the health, safety and happiness of people

When I ask fire science students to articulate the end, or purpose, of their field, they eventually generalize to something like, "The safety and welfare of society," which seems right.

norm /nɔ:m/ (noun, C1) an accepted standard way of behaving

Etiquette-sensitive artificial translators could relieve people of the need to know these differing cultural norms.

hierarchy /'haɪərɑːki/ (noun, C1) a system that ranks people by importance or power

In fact, research shows that, when innovating, the best approach is to create an environment devoid of structure and hierarchy and enable everyone involved to engage as one organic group.

ancestor /'ænsɛstə/ (noun, B2) a family member who lived a long time ago

When our ancestors found themselves surrounded by hungry animals, they would have benefited from an increased ability to learn about hazards.

folklore /'fɒklɔː/ (noun, C1) the traditional stories and beliefs of a community

Local folklore maintains that the statues walked, while researchers have tended to assume the ancestors dragged the statues somehow, using ropes and logs.

legacy /'legəsi/ (noun, C1) something left by a person or period for later generations

In collecting paintings that they loved, the sisters created a lasting and meaningful cultural legacy for the people of Wales and beyond.

artefact /'ɑːtɪfækt/ (noun, C1) an object made by people, especially long ago

There they found numerous artefacts, including fragments of axes, some dating to about 14,000 years ago.

Phrases for Speaking and Writing

walks of life different jobs, backgrounds and social positions

The people in my club come from completely different walks of life, and I doubt I'd ever have met them otherwise.

privileged background a family with money and many advantages

So she didn't come from the kind of privileged background that a lot of tennis players have.

equal pay paying men and women the same for the same work

Beyond tennis, I also respect the way she's spoken out about issues like equal pay for women and the health risks Black women face during childbirth, even when it attracted criticism.

speak out about talk publicly about a problem, often bravely

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role model a person others admire and try to copy

So for me Messi is not only a great player, he is also a good role model for the young people who want to be successful.

face-to-face contact meeting people in person

In my view, social media can do both, but its overall effect depends on whether it supports or replaces face-to-face contact.

migrant workers people who move to another place to find work

Migrant workers, for example, can follow their children's daily lives through photos and video messages, and old classmates who lost contact years ago can easily find one another again.

lose contact stop communicating with someone

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feelings of inadequacy the sense of not being good enough

Furthermore, many users constantly compare themselves with the carefully edited lives they see on their screens, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.

close relationships strong personal connections with friends and family

A "like" or a short comment requires little effort, and some people collect hundreds of online friends while having very few close relationships in real life.

an illusion of contact a false feeling of being connected to people

Scrolling through acquaintances' holiday photos creates an illusion of contact without any of the effort that genuine friendship requires, and several studies have linked heavy, passive use with higher levels of loneliness, particularly among teenagers.

join a support group become part of a group that helps each other

Messaging a friend, organising a reunion or joining a support group are active uses that strengthen relationships.

give a voice to let a group of people express their views

Online groups also give a voice to people who might otherwise be alone with their circumstances, from new parents to carers of relatives with dementia.

on good terms having a friendly relationship

We've been on good terms ever since.

community centre a public building for local events and activities

So she started a monthly repair cafe in the local community centre, where volunteers mend things for free and, crucially, show the owners how to do it themselves.

a fulfilling retirement a satisfying life after you stop working

Spending time with her has made me rethink what a fulfilling retirement, or indeed a fulfilling life, looks like.

drift apart slowly become less close over time

We drifted apart a little when we went to different secondary schools, but we still meet up whenever I go home.

lose touch stop communicating with each other

He moved abroad with his family when we were fourteen, and for a while we lost touch altogether.

family gatherings occasions when relatives meet together

She's an architect in her mid-forties, and she lives about an hour away from us, so she tends to turn up at family gatherings and, more often than not, steal the show.

elderly relatives old members of your family

Remote workers can often organise their day around other responsibilities, such as caring for young children or elderly relatives.

food festivals community events celebrating food from the area

Autumn is also harvest season in our region, so there are lots of local food festivals, and I usually come home with far more apples and honey than I can actually eat.