

IELTS Writing

Book 1



Introduction & 10 Top Tips

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Understanding the Writing Test & 10 Top Tips

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Understanding the Writing Test

This short book is an introduction to the Writing test to provide you with important information about the test in general before we move on to studying the different parts of the exam in detail in books 2, 3 and 4.

To achieve high marks in the IELTS Writing test, you must first understand the format of the exam. You also need to know what you will be assessed on and how you'll be assessed.

So, we're going to look at:

- **The format of the test**
- **Which test to choose – Academic or General**
- **Skills assessed**
- **Marking criteria**

The Format of the Writing Test

Timing – 60 minutes

Important facts:

- The writing test has two parts – Task 1 and Task 2.
- You must write a minimum of 150 words for Task 1 and a minimum of 250 words for Task 2.
- Task 1 should take you around 20 minutes and Task 2 around 40 minutes.
- Task 2 contributes twice as many marks to your overall score as Task 1.

Two versions

There are two versions of the IELTS writing test – **Academic** and **General Training**.

Task 2 is the same for both tests, but Task 1 is different.

The main difference is in the style of question and the type of language required to answer it. Here are detailed outlines of the two versions of the test.

Academic Writing

Task 1 – You will be presented with one of the following:

- Bar chart
- Line graph
- Table
- Pie chart
- Diagram
- Process

You are required to describe, summarise or explain the information in your own words. For example, you may be asked to:

- describe and explain data
- describe the stages of a process
- describe how something works
- describe an object or event

Task 2 – You must write an essay on a topic of general interest. The essay will be a response to a specific point of view, problem or argument that will be stated in the question.

Your response to both tasks should be written in a formal style.

General Training Writing

Task 1 – You are required to write a letter requesting information or explaining the situation in relation to a specific circumstance.

The letter must be in one of the following styles as appropriate to the situation:

- **Formal** – to someone you don't know.
- **Informal** – to a friend or close family member.

Task 2 – You will be required to write an essay on a topic of general interest. Your essay will be a response to a specific point of view, problem or argument that will be stated in the question.

You may use a more personal style than would be required in the Academic Writing Task 2 essay.

Which Version of the Writing Test Should You Take?

IELTS Academic is required by universities and professional registration bodies.

You should take the Academic test if you want to apply for a place at a university or other higher education institution in an English country or in a non-native English-speaking country where courses are taught in the English language.

IELTS Academic is also generally preferred by professional bodies in English-speaking countries and required for registration.

This is particularly the case in fields such as:

- **Medicine**
- **Nursing**
- **Pharmacy**
- **Accounting**
- **Engineering**
- **Law**
- **Teaching**

IELTS General is for people wanting to work in or emigrate to the UK, Ireland, Australia, Canada or New Zealand. It is widely accepted for:

- **Visa and employment applications**
- **Education at high-school level**
- **Non-academic training such as practical vocational courses**

Skills Assessed

The Writing test is designed to assess your ability in a wide range of skills including:

- **writing an appropriate response**
- **organisation of ideas**
- **accuracy and range of vocabulary and grammar**

The assessment criteria for any specific essay will depend on the type of task you are asked to complete, but here's a general overview.

Don't worry if you feel slightly overwhelmed after reading it. This book contains all the help and step-by-step guidance you need to write high scoring essays.

Academic

Task 1 – Your essay will be assessed in relation to your ability to achieve one or more of the following:

- **organise, present and possibly compare data**
- **describe the stages of a process or procedure**
- **describe an object or event or sequence of events**
- **explain how something works**

Task 2 – Your essay will be assessed in relation to your ability to achieve one or more of the following:

- **present a solution to a problem**
- **present and justify an opinion**
- **compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications**
- **evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument**

General Training

Task 1 – Your letter will assess your ability to engage in personal correspondence and be assessed in relation to one or more of these skills:

- **Elicit and provide general factual information**
- **Express needs, wants, likes and dislikes**
- **Express opinions (e.g. views, complaints)**

Task 2 – Your essay will be assessed in relation to one or more of the following:

- **Outline a problem and present a solution**
- **Present and justify an opinion**
- **Evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument**

Marking Criteria

As with the other three sections of the IELTS exam – Speaking, Reading and Listening – the Writing test is marked according to four criteria.

These are:

- **Task Achievement** – appropriate response to the task
- **Coherence & Cohesion** – the ability to present a well-structured essay
- **Lexical Resource** – the ability to use a range of appropriate vocabulary and to use it correctly
- **Grammatical Range & Accuracy** – the ability to use grammar correctly and to use a range of grammar forms

Each carries 25% of the marks.

We'll be looking at these marking criteria in detail in the other three books in this series on the Writing test.

Top 10 Writing Tips

Here are my top 10 tips for the Writing test. They are very important to your success and I'll be covering them in more detail when we look at the individual tasks in the different sections of test.

This is just a quick introduction but please read it carefully to make sure that you understand each tip.

They are relevant for both the Academic and General writing tests and will help you with Task 1 and Task 2.

Tip 1: Read the question & instructions carefully

One of the most common reasons for a low score in the writing test is not answering the question correctly. The cause of this is not fully understanding the question and the instructions.

The questions are not difficult to understand but you do need to study their structures and know how to analyse them.

You will learn how to do this in the chapters on:

Understanding Academic Task 1 Questions

Understanding General Task 1 Questions

Understanding Task 2 Questions

Tip 2: Plan your answer

Always spend a few minutes planning your answer before you start writing.

There are 3 reasons for this:

- **Planning saves you time**
- **Planning leads to a more relevant answer**
- **Planning results in a better structure**

If you plan your essay before you start writing, you will already know what you're going to say and won't need to keep stopping to think about the next idea. This means that you will be able to write much faster than if you don't have a plan.

Planning also ensures that you include everything that the question requires so that you meet the marking criteria for task achievement which holds 25% of the marks.

Furthermore, it will give your answer a more organised structure which will gain you marks for coherence and cohesion. This marking criterion carries another 25% of the marks.

You will learn how to do this in the chapters on:

How To Plan an Academic Task 1 Essay

How To Plan an IELTS Letter

How To Plan a Task 2 Essay

Tip 3: Know the answer structures

The great news is, you only need to learn two essay structures, one for Task 1 and the other for Task 2. These can be used for any question you might get.

Sometimes you will need to adapt them a little, but the same basic structure remains the same. However, they are easy to learn and with practice, you'll soon be able to write high-scoring answers within the time limit allowed.

I cover essay structures on the planning pages and in the chapters on the different essay types.

Tip 4: Understand the marking criteria

To get a high score in the Writing exam, you need to know exactly what the examiner wants. So, an important step to achieving success is to understand the marking criteria.

Here are the 4 skill areas you'll be assessed on:

- **Task Achievement**
- **Coherence and Cohesion**
- **Vocabulary (Lexical Resource)**
- **Grammar**

Each carries 25% of the marks.

There's lots more information on assessment and marking criteria coming up later.

Tip 5: Be familiarized with the common topics

There are specific topics that come up regularly in each part of the Writing test. If you practice answering questions on these subjects as part of your preparation, you'll be well prepared for exam day.

I'll be showing you step-by-step how to answer questions on a wide range of topics in the chapters on the different types of Writing tasks.

Tip 6: Use synonyms & paraphrasing

You will need to use the key words from the questions in your answers. Where possible, use synonyms rather than just repeating the same words.

This is essential for achieving a high score for lexical resource (vocabulary) which counts for another 25% of the total marks. The examiner will not be impressed if you just use the same words over and over again.

You also need to know how to paraphrase, that is, say the same thing in different ways using different sentence structures and synonyms.

This isn't just an IELTS writing tip, but applies to the Reading, Speaking and Listening sections of the exam as well.

I'll be talking about this a lot and have lots of examples for you to learn from.

Tip 7: Write the correct number of words

Word count is something else to pay close attention to.

- **Task 1 – a minimum of 150 words**
- **Task 2 – a minimum of 250 words**

So that you don't waste valuable time counting every word, work out the average number of words you write per line and multiply this by the number of lines in your answer. Practice doing this during your preparation and you'll soon be able to quickly and accurately estimate your word count.

If you write fewer words than required, you will lose marks for task achievement. However, you will not necessarily get a higher score for writing more than the minimum number of words. Marks are given for the quality of what you write, not the quantity.

When writing sample answers, I aim for around 160 to 180 words for Task 1 and 260 to 280 words for Task 2. This enables me to include all the information required without going off topic.

Tip 8: Be specific

Every part of your answer should be directly relevant to the questions. The question will tell you exactly what to write about, so make sure that you stay on topic and don't write about anything else.

For example, for a question about the impact of fossil fuels on global warming, write about this specific issue, not global warming in general.

Tip 9: Carefully manage your time

Here is the recommended time allocation:

- **Task 1 – 20 minutes**
- **Task 2 – 40 minutes**

Planning your answer before you start writing will help you to complete your essay or letter in the time allowed.

Important information – Task 2 contributes twice as many marks to your overall score as Task 1. For this reason, my advice is to do Task 2 first.

Most people do Task 1 first and overrun on the 20 minutes it should take them. This doesn't leave them enough time to do Task 2 properly. Since Task 2 is worth double the marks, they are, in effect, throwing away valuable marks.

Tip 10: Check your answers

You'd be amazed at how many candidates fail to check their answers and lose marks on silly little mistakes that they would easily have spotted had they read through their work.

I always find several mistakes in the sample answers I write despite English being my native language.

This is partly a time management issue as you need to leave a couple of minutes at the end to complete your check.

I have one final tip for you:

Practice, Practice, Practice

This is the only way to improve your skills and ensure a high mark.