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EXAMINER APPROVED!

IELTS ACADEMIC & GENERAL
TASK 2
HOW TO WRITE AT A BAND 9 LEVEL



IELTS
Academic and General Task 2:
How to write at a band 9 level

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FOREWORD

The 2021 version of this book marks the fifth update since this work was first released in 2010. The purpose of this book has always been to provide the IELTS candidate with a brief but actionable summary of how to write an effective essay in the Task 2 portion of the Academic and General IELTS exams. This book should act as a supplement to the candidate's repertoire of IELTS Writing resources. Although a helpful guide, candidates should couple what they learn from this book with active practice and personal feedback from an IELTS Writing coach. For candidates that do not have access to guidance, free feedback may be received from the 'Post your writing' section of the IELTSNetwork.com forum.

IELTS candidates should remember that there is no universally 'correct' IELTS essay format. Examiners award marks to a candidate's written language based on its strength across four different criteria - Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resources, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. This book provides Task 2 structural suggestions that are designed to be flexible and able to fulfil these four criteria given any IELTS essay question. However, candidates still need to think critically about the question they receive on the exam. Tailoring the Task 2 structures taught in this book may be required.

This work was read for accuracy by a practising IELTS examiner on 16 June 2014. 'Practising IELTS examiner' is defined as a person holding a letter from the IELTS Test Partners indicating their current status as an active IELTS examiner. The proofreading examiner answered 'yes' when asked (1) whether all information provided in this book is accurate and in line with IELTS success and (2) whether all sample responses in this book would be likely to score band 9 if produced in an actual IELTS sitting. The participating examiner was asked to operate at a capacity that they felt did not call their confidentiality arrangement with Cambridge ESOL, the British Council, and IDP Australia into question.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	3
Section 1 - IELTS Writing Task 2 basics	
1.1 What is required on the IELTS Writing exam?.....	5
1.2 What is an essay?.....	8
1.3 Interpreting Task 2 essay questions	11
1.4 The thesis	21
Section 2 - Building an essay	
2.1 How to write an introduction paragraph.....	24
2.2 Coherence and Cohesion.....	31
2.3 How to write supporting paragraphs	35
2.4 How to write a conclusion paragraph	45
2.5 Cohesion at the essay level.....	52
2.6 The delicate nature of concession	54
2.7 How to write a discussion essay	57
Section 3 - Applying argument or discussion structure to alternative question types	
3.1 Advantage and disadvantage questions	62
3.2 Cause and effect/problem and solution questions	66
3.3 Double action questions.....	72
Frequently asked questions	79
Review.....	82
About the author	89

1.1



WHAT IS REQUIRED

ON THE IELTS WRITING EXAM?

The writing portion of the IELTS is 60 minutes in length and requires the candidate complete two writing samples referred to as *Task 1* and *Task 2*. The candidate's overall writing band weights a third to Task 1 and two thirds to Task 2. Candidates are thus expected to allot 20 minutes to Task 1 and 40 minutes to Task 2.

The Academic and General Writing exams are different. Task 1 of the Academic exam requires the candidate describe information presented in a graph, table, chart, diagram or map, or some combination of these sources. Task 1 of the General exam requires the candidate write a letter. Candidates must write essays to fulfil Task 2 on both exams; however, General Module candidates do not forfeit marks if their writing is less formal in tone.

Despite these differences between the Academic and General exams, the marking rubric examiners use to grade Task 2 on both tests is very similar. Candidates are assessed on their performance in four categories: Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resources, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The *Task Achievement* portion of the mark gauges the extent to which the candidate is able to fulfil the requirements of the essay task. *Coherence and Cohesion* is a measure of the candidate's ability to deliver and connect ideas in a way that expresses a message clearly. The *Lexical Resources* portion of the mark assesses the accuracy, variety and relevance of the vocabulary a candidate uses in their essay. *Grammatical Range and Accuracy* grades the candidate's demonstration of grammatical competence and execution.

These four sections are interdependent, and thus performing poorly in one often lowers performance in others. Although the marking breadths are usually displayed as having a lateral relationship in most public IELTS literature (see Figure 1.1), this relationship is more accurately described as one founded on the strength of a candidate's grammatical and lexical resources (see Figure 1.2).

IELTS TASK 2 Writing band descriptors (public version)

Band	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fully addresses all parts of the task presents a fully developed position in answer to the question with relevant, fully extended and well supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention skillfully manages paragraphing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sufficiently addresses all parts of the task presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sequences information and ideas logically manages all aspects of cohesion well uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings skillfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures the majority of sentences are error-free makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> addresses all parts of the task presents a clear position throughout the response provides relevant and supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately, although there may be some repetition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a variety of complex structures produces frequent error-free sentences has good control of grammar and punctuation, but may make a few errors

Figure 1.1

Accurate grammatical and lexical demonstration acts as a base for the communication of any message. A candidate with weak grammatical and lexical execution *cannot* score well for coherence — the message simply isn't clear enough to make this possible. Poor grammar and lexical choices can also impact the ability of the sentences and paragraphs in a candidate's response to work together, thus reducing the clarity with which the links between ideas can be seen, traits otherwise known as *coherence* and *cohesion*. When both coherence and cohesion suffer, the response's fulfilment of task is limited, as the candidate simply does not have the ability to extend the answer and develop a full response.

Assuming the candidate has interpreted the Task 2 question correctly and structured their essay appropriately, the interdependence that exists between these four assessed areas reveals overarching traits of certain IELTS Writing bands.

For example, when the IELTS examiner reads a band 5 candidate's writing, there will be occasional moments when they lose track of what the writer is saying. These periodic instances of complete incoherence are,

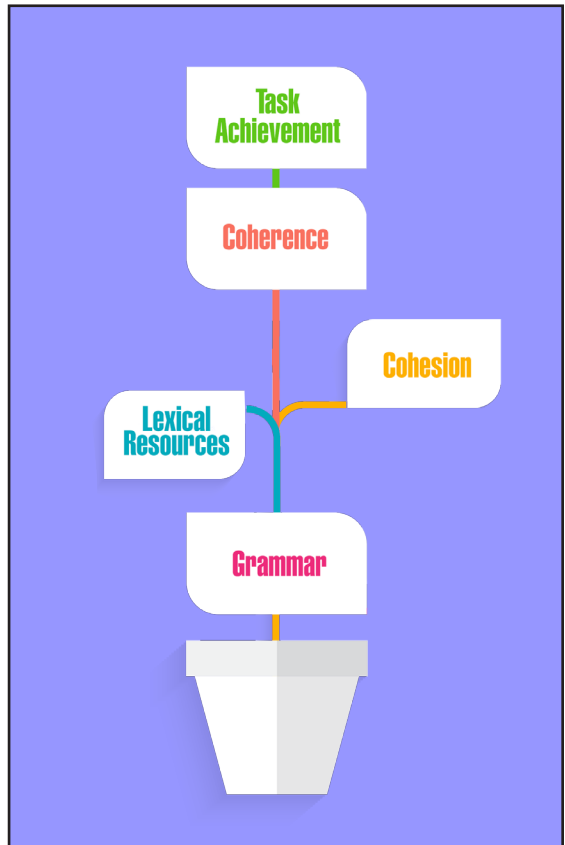


Figure 1.2

however, not present at the band 6 level, and this is a clear distinguisher between the two. Band 6 candidates are capable of producing ideas that can be understood by the examiner a majority of the time despite grammatical and lexical inaccuracy in more than 50% of all sentences. It is for this reason that candidates often get stuck at the band 6 level: they don't realise they are making mistakes because their writing successfully communicates a message. Band 7 candidates are an improvement on this. They produce coherent ideas and are capable of writing accurate sentences more than 50% of the time; however, mild wording issues result in regular instances of awkward constructions or improper tone. Band 8 and beyond is denoted by increasingly few grammatical and lexical errors despite a growth in the complexity of sentence structures.

1.2



HAT IS AN ESSAY?

In IELTS Task 2, the candidate is required to write an essay, a structure that must be understood before it can be effectively created. The easiest way to define an essay is to first define the smaller units it is made of:

What is a sentence?

A sentence is a group of words.

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of sentences.

What is an essay?

An essay is a group of paragraphs.

In its most basic form, an essay supports, refutes or analyses a topic through the use of examples, discussion and reason. The purpose of an essay is to either (1) declare a position on a topic and persuade the reader to agree or (2) derive a position on a topic after discussing this topic in writing. The most straightforward approach to scoring well in Task 2 is to structure the response in a logical way that allows the candidate to make and analyse claims, share and discuss examples, and draw conclusions, all within 40 minutes. This is best done using a structure that is divided into four or five paragraphs. Each paragraph is subdivided into several sentences, and each sentence carries out a specific job. When united, the sentences work towards a strong centralised purpose: either to argue in support of a position, or to discuss multiple positions.

To illustrate, look at this argument essay structure:

Paragraph 1 - Introduction

- Sentence 1 - Background statement
- Sentence 2 - Detailed background statement
- Sentence 3 - Thesis

- Sentence 4 - Outline sentence

Paragraph 2 - First supporting paragraph

- Sentence 1 - Topic
- Sentence 2 - Example
- Sentence 3 - Discussion
- Sentence 4 - Conclusion

Paragraph 3 - Second supporting paragraph

- Sentence 1 - Topic
- Sentence 2 - Example
- Sentence 3 - Discussion
- Sentence 4 - Conclusion

Paragraph 4 - Conclusion

- Sentence 1 - Summary
- Sentence 2 - Restatement of thesis
- Sentence 3 - Prediction or recommendation

This essay structure contains a total of 15 sentences and will put an IELTS essay at roughly 250-275 words, a length that is long enough to allow the candidate to fulfil their essay question but also short enough that it can be produced within 40 minutes. Each sentence should present a clear idea and link to other areas in the essay using cohesive phrases.

Following an essay structure such as the above provides the IELTS candidate with numerous advantages. For one, it allows the candidate to save time in the examination room, as a decision on essay format has been made ahead of time. Secondly, this structure encourages cohesion at the essay level, which directly benefits a candidate's Coherence and Cohesion mark. This in turn improves the candidate's Task Achievement mark, as using the structure guides the candidate towards a fuller response to the essay question. Finally, simply knowing that the essay's structure has already been decided can be a huge confidence boost for the candidate when in the

exam room, and confidence always leads to better writing. Being capable of producing and adapting essay structures before entering the exam room gives the candidate control over their exam and sets up a scenario within which they are much more likely to be successful.

1.3



INTERPRETING TASK 2 ESSAY QUESTIONS

Understanding the meaning of an essay question is essential to writing a solid essay in response. When interpreting essay questions, the candidate should first pinpoint these three attributes: *keywords*, *qualifying words*, *action words*.

To demonstrate these three properties, take the following essay question:

Technology is becoming increasingly prevalent in the world today. In the not too distant future, technology will completely replace the teacher in the classroom. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Keywords are the topics that focus the candidate's writing. In other words, they are the subjects that can be included in the candidate's written response. In this example essay question, 'technology' and 'education' are the two controlling *keywords*. Topics outside the spheres of 'technology' and 'education' thus have no place in this essay.

Qualifying words are the words in the question which tell the candidate how the various ideas relate. They are often the words that describe degree and frame some overarching opinion. In the above sample question, the phrase 'increasingly prevalent' is used. Notice how this clarifies what is being said about technology - *technology is being used more and more in classroom education*. The phrase 'completely replace' shapes the relationship expected to develop between technology and education - *teachers are going to be eliminated by technological advancement*. 'In the not too distant future' makes clear that the prediction in the question is expected to occur somewhat soon. Notice how these *qualifying words* shape the question and give it increased precision and depth. It is very important the candidate understands the nature of this depth to ensure their response is accurately aligned to the question.

Here are some simplified examples of *qualifying words* grouped by what they describe:

Contrast

Technology's presence is growing the world over. **Despite this**, its ability to replace a human in the near future is unlikely.

Although technology's presence in the classroom is growing the world over, its ability to replace a human teacher in the near future is unlikely.

Technology-based instructors are very good at teaching simple concepts through repetitive games. **However**, they are incapable of maintaining control of young students in a dynamic classroom setting.

Technology-based instructors are very good at teaching simple concepts through repetitive games. **On the other hand**, they are incapable of maintaining control of young students in a dynamic classroom setting.

Unlike a human teacher, technology-driven instructors can carry on teaching for an indefinite period of time.

In contrast to a human teacher, technology-driven instructors can carry on teaching for an indefinite period of time.

A human teacher can only teach for a finite amount of time, **whereas** a technology-driven instructor can carry on teaching indefinitely.

A human teacher can only teach for a finite amount of time, **while** a technology-driven instructor can carry on teaching indefinitely.

A human teacher can only teach for a finite amount of time. **Conversely**, a technology-driven instructor can carry on teaching indefinitely.

A human teacher can only teach for a finite amount of time. **This differs from** a technology-driven instructor, which could carry on teaching indefinitely.

Compare

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. This is something it has **in common with** human teachers.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students, **as would a** human teacher.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students, a trait it **has in common with** human teachers.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. Human teachers would **likewise** need to tailor their teaching approach.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. **Similarly**, human teachers would **also** need to tailor their teaching approach.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. **This mirrors** the approach of human teachers, who would **also** need to tailor their teaching.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. **This parallels** the approach of human teachers, who would **also** need to tailor their teaching.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. **This reflects** the approach of human teachers, who would **also** need to tailor their teaching.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. **This resembles** the approach of human teachers, who would **also** need to tailor their teaching.

A technology-driven teacher would need to adjust lessons to its students. In this way, the approach of human teachers is **alike**.

Support

A technology-driven teacher would not tire, a quality **beneficial** to lessons that require extended periods of repetition.

A technology-driven teacher would not tire, a quality **advantageous** to lessons that require extended periods of repetition.

A technology-driven teacher would not tire, a **positive** trait when it comes to lessons that require extended periods of repetition.

A technology-driven teacher would not tire, a **desirable** trait when it comes to lessons that require extended periods of repetition.

Refute

Technology-based teaching would have difficulty catering to individual students needs, a **drawback** to this teaching arrangement.

Technology-based teaching would have difficulty catering to individual students needs, a **disadvantage** to this teaching arrangement.

An **undesirable** trait of technology-driven teaching is the difficulty it would have when catering to individual students needs.

A **negative** trait of technology-driven teaching is the difficulty it would have when catering to individual students needs.

Increase

Technology's role in the classroom **has been climbing** the world over.

Technology's role in the classroom **has been increasing** the world over.

Technology's role in the classroom **has been growing** the world over.

Maintain

Technology's role in the classroom is expected to **remain steady** into the foreseeable future.

Technology's role in the classroom is expected to **remain stable** into the foreseeable future.

Technology's role in the classroom is expected to **remain unchanged** into the foreseeable future.

Decrease

Technology's presence in the classroom is expected to **decline** in the foreseeable future.

Technology's presence in the classroom is expected to **drop** in the foreseeable future.

Technology's presence in the classroom is expected to **shrink** in the foreseeable future.

A **reduced** presence of technology in the classroom is expected to carry on into the foreseeable future.

Instability

Technology's initial growth as a classroom presence was **volatile**.

Technology's initial growth as a classroom presence was **varied**.

Technology's initial growth as a classroom presence was **unstable**.

Technology's initial growth as a classroom presence was **unpredictable**.

Maximum/Minimum

Technology's presence in the classroom **spiked** in the early 2000s.

Technology's presence in the classroom **peaked** in the early 2000s.

Technology's presence in the classroom **hit a trough** in the early 2000s.

Technology's presence in the classroom **hit bottom** in the early 2000s.

Remarkable

Technology's presence in the classroom has grown in **unexpected** ways.

Technology's presence in the classroom has grown in **astounding** ways.

Technology's presence in the classroom has grown in **unorthodox** ways.

Action words are the words that elicit response from the candidate and ultimately channel the candidate's writing towards an argument or discussion essay structure. In the above example essay question, the *action words* are 'do you agree or disagree with this statement', a phrase that instructs the candidate to choose and support a position. This scenario is best responded to using an argument essay structure.

Here are some additional IELTS *action words* grouped by what they require:

Requiring the candidate support

Support this statement.

Argue in favour of this statement.

Prove this statement.

Requiring the candidate refute

Refute this statement.

Disprove this statement.

Why is this statement untrue?

Requiring the candidate support or refute

Do you agree or disagree?

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

What is your opinion?

How do you feel about this?

Come to a reasoned conclusion.

Requiring the candidate compare/discuss

Contrast these two ideas.

Compare these issues.

Discuss this problem.

Present a discussion on this issue.

Analyse both sides of this statement.

Combining the *keywords* with the *qualifying words* delivers an understanding of the context within which the Task 2 question is framed. Responding appropriately to the *action words* within this context is at the very base of IELTS essay success.

When engaging the exam, a misinterpreted question can instantly cause a candidate's writing to drop several bands, as it could mean all examples, discussion and conclusions are misaligned with the IELTS Writing task. To avoid this, the candidate should always take a moment to mentally paraphrase the question before they start writing to ensure they understand precisely what the question is asking. For example, a fitting reword of the above essay question could be:

Do you agree or disagree that technology will supersede the role of teachers in the near future?

Now that the question is fully understood, it can be responded to effectively.

Try it yourself!

Decide what the *keywords*, *qualifying words* and *action words* are for these sample Task 2 writing questions. Then rewrite each question in your own words.

Of all public transportation options, a metro is the most convenient way to get around a large city. Do you agree or disagree?

Keywords:

Qualifying words:

Action words:

Reworded question:

The world's wealthiest countries have increasingly been outsourcing labour-related jobs to cheaper alternatives in other nations. Write an essay supporting the case for the outsourcing of labour.

Keywords:

Qualifying words:

Action words:

Reworded question:

Many people feel violent media encourages real-life violence among young people. What do you think causes young people to behave violently?

Keywords:

Qualifying words:

Action words:

Reworded question:

More than one university degree is required to get ahead in many professions today. In the future, it is likely that people will attain a number of degrees before even starting work. Respond to this argument.

Keywords:

Qualifying words:

Action words:

Reworded question: