

IELTS Writing: What Makes a Strong Response?

Understand what IELTS examiners look for, why some responses struggle to reach higher bands, and how to make your writing clearer, more developed and more effective.

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What you'll find in this guide

IELTS Writing isn't simply about using advanced vocabulary or producing long, complicated sentences. A strong response addresses the task, develops ideas, organises information and demonstrates appropriate language use.

Also, this guide focuses primarily on IELTS Academic Writing, although many principles also apply to General Training.

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A Note from LEAP

"I know quite a lot of English vocabulary and grammar. Why can't I get a higher Writing band?"

It's a fair question, and one we hear often. Some learners have a reasonable vocabulary range but struggle to use words naturally. Others can construct complex sentences yet find it difficult to develop a convincing argument. And some spend hours writing practice essays without knowing what is holding them back.

That's why we encourage candidates to look beyond memorised phrases, model essays and isolated grammar mistakes. Good writing is about communicating ideas effectively within the requirements of the task.

01. Understanding the Four Assessment Criteria

IELTS Writing is assessed using four equally weighted criteria. The first criterion differs between Task 1 and Task 2.

a. Task Achievement / Task Response

The central question: Have you addressed what the task is asking you to do?

For Academic Task 1, this involves selecting and reporting important information accurately, highlighting key features and making relevant comparisons. For Task 2, it involves responding to the question, presenting a clear position where required and developing relevant supporting ideas.

A common issue is that candidates write grammatically reasonable paragraphs that don't fully answer the question.

LEAP'S TIP

We often see test-takers rush into writing because they are worried about time. But your first priority should be understanding the task. Take a moment to unpack the prompt before you begin. Even a fluent, well-organised essay can lose marks if its arguments do not address the question.

b. Coherence and Cohesion

The central question: Can the reader follow your ideas easily?

Coherence concerns the logical organisation and progression of ideas. Cohesion concerns how sentences and paragraphs are connected, including paragraphing, referencing and appropriate linking expressions. More linking words do not automatically improve coherence.

Compare:

- *"Firstly, technology is important. Furthermore, it is useful. Moreover, people use it every day."*
- *"Technology can make education more accessible by allowing students in remote areas to attend lessons online."*

The second example communicates a more specific relationship between ideas without relying on several linking expressions.

c. Lexical Resource

The central question: Can you use vocabulary accurately, appropriately and flexibly?

Lexical Resource is not simply about how many "big words" you know. It involves choosing words that fit the context, using natural word combinations and expressing ideas precisely.

For example: "People can acquire a lot of benefits from exercise."

The meaning is understandable, but the phrasing is less natural for academic writing. A more appropriate alternative is: "People can gain considerable benefits from regular exercise."

The difference is not necessarily about using harder vocabulary. It is about making more appropriate language choices.

LEAP'S TIP

Pay attention to collocations: words that commonly occur together. Expressions such as “pose a challenge”, “play a significant role” and “draw a conclusion” can make your writing more natural when they genuinely fit the context.

d. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

The central question: Can you use different grammatical structures effectively and accurately?

IELTS considers both the range of structures you attempt and how accurately you use them. Complex sentences can communicate relationships between ideas, but unnecessary complexity often creates problems.

Compare:

- *“Technology is useful. It allows people to communicate across distances.”*
- *“Technology is useful because it allows people to communicate across distances.”*

The second sentence expresses a clear relationship using a subordinate clause. You do not need to make every sentence complicated. Use a variety of structures when they serve your meaning.

02. Why More Practice Doesn't Always Mean Better Writing

This might sound counterintuitive. Imagine writing ten Task 2 essays over two weeks. You may become faster, but if you repeat the same mistakes, you may also reinforce those habits.

This is something we encourage students to consider when planning their preparation. In LEAP Guided and Performance Coaching, we spend time on flexible structure, targeted strategies and the reasons behind recurring writing problems.

Three Common Problems

1. Practising without identifying the underlying issue

You know your Writing score is below your target, but you are unsure whether the main problem is task response, organisation, vocabulary or grammar. Without a clearer diagnosis, choosing useful activities is difficult.

2. Reading feedback without applying it

You receive corrections, read them and move on to another essay. Recognising a mistake is not the same as being able to avoid it independently.

3. Focusing on surface-level improvements

You replace ordinary words with sophisticated synonyms or add more linking phrases, but your arguments remain underdeveloped. Lexical Resource and Grammar are not simply about avoiding mistakes or choosing fancier vocabulary.

LEAP'S TIP

Instead of measuring progress only by the number of essays you complete, consider how effectively you use feedback. Carefully revising one essay can be more productive than writing several new responses without reviewing them.

Want a more structured approach to writing? [Explore IELTS Guided and Performance Coaching →](#)

03. What Does Stronger Writing Actually Look Like?

Consider this IELTS-style question:

“Some people believe that universities should focus on preparing students for employment, while others argue that universities should prioritise academic knowledge. Discuss both views and give your opinion.”

Example A: Limited Development

“Universities should prepare students for jobs because employment is very important. Students need skills, and universities should teach these skills. This can help students find good jobs in the future.”

The main idea is relevant, but the explanation remains general. The writer repeats the importance of employment without explaining what skills are needed or how universities might develop them.

Example B: More Developed Reasoning

“One argument for employment-focused university education is that graduates are increasingly expected to apply their knowledge in professional settings. By incorporating internships and industry-based projects into degree programmes, universities can help students develop practical skills while gaining experience relevant to their future careers.”

The second response uses more developed academic vocabulary and grammatical structures, but it also develops the argument more clearly. It identifies an expectation, explains how universities could respond and connects that response to a benefit for graduates.

The improvement is not simply the result of longer words. The reasoning itself is more developed.

A NOTE FROM LEAP

These examples illustrate differences in idea development. They are not official IELTS band-scored responses, and a single paragraph cannot establish an overall Writing band.

04. Vocabulary and Grammar: Accuracy Before Complexity

Many candidates believe they need increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve a higher band. Linguistic range matters, but it needs to be accompanied by control.

Vocabulary: Choose Precision Over Decoration

Instead of asking “*What’s a more advanced word I can use here?*”, try “*What’s the most appropriate word for the meaning I want to express?*” A natural, precise expression is usually more effective than an unusual word used incorrectly.

Grammar: Use Complexity With a Purpose

Complex structures can help express:

- Cause and effect
- Contrast and concession
- Conditions and possibilities
- Comparisons
- Qualifications and limitations

For example: “*Although online learning offers greater flexibility, some students may find it difficult to remain motivated without regular face-to-face interaction.*”

LEAP’S TIP

Don’t aim to make every sentence complex. Effective academic writing uses a mixture of structures to communicate ideas clearly and accurately.

05. Making Better Use of Writing Feedback

Feedback can be valuable, but its usefulness depends on what you do with it. We encourage candidates to treat feedback as part of an ongoing learning process, not simply a score or a collection of corrections.

This is a major focus of LEAP Guided and Performance Coaching: teachers help learners interpret feedback, identify priorities and turn suggestions into actionable steps for future writing.

[Explore IELTS preparation and personalised feedback →](#)

A Simple Feedback Routine

Step 1. Identify the main issue

Was the problem related to your argument, organisation, vocabulary or grammar?

Step 2. Understand why it matters

If your argument was underdeveloped, what information or reasoning was missing?

Step 3. Revise your response

Improve the original paragraph or essay rather than immediately starting a new one.

Step 4. Apply the lesson independently

In your next writing task, check whether the same problem appears again.

LEAP'S TIP

Whether feedback comes from a teacher or an AI-powered tool, look for explanations that help you understand why something needs improving. A corrected sentence shows what to change; useful feedback should also help you make better decisions next time.

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A Final Word from LEAP

IELTS Writing improvement doesn't always happen quickly, particularly when the challenges involve deeper language development rather than unfamiliarity with the test. But understanding what strong writing involves is an important starting point.

You don't need to memorise hundreds of sophisticated expressions or produce unnecessarily complicated sentences. Focus instead on answering the task, developing ideas, organising your writing and using language accurately and appropriately. Most importantly, make sure your practice gives you opportunities to learn from your mistakes.

Continue Your Preparation with LEAP

Want to understand your Writing performance? Explore LEAP Exam for IELTS writing practice and AI-powered feedback to help identify potential areas for improvement.

Looking for more personalised support? LEAP IELTS Guided and Performance Coaching offer structured preparation and teacher-led feedback.

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Questions about IELTS preparation? contact@leapenglishpathways.com

This guide provides general educational advice and illustrative examples. IELTS Writing scores are determined by trained examiners using official assessment criteria. For the latest descriptors and requirements, consult the official IELTS website.