

IELTS GENERAL **TASK 1**

HOW TO WRITE AT A BAND 9 LEVEL



**IELTS
General Task 1:
How to write at a 9 level**

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FOREWORD

This book has been written to briefly summarize what a student needs to do to score band 9 on the Task 1 portion of the IELTS General exam. It is a summary of skills and is presented in a manner that is expected to be informative yet concise. Please note that this book should not act as the student's sole preparatory resource for Task 1. A regimen involving regular practice and guided IELTS instructor feedback is highly recommended. All example Task 1 questions appearing in this book have been taken from real IELTS exams in an effort to give the student more genuine IELTS exposure.

Your purchase of this work entitles you to receive edition updates free of charge. Please remember that this book comes as the result of months of writing, drafting, editing, classroom testing and rewriting and is a product of my 9 years of IELTS instructor experience. I do not ask much in terms of compensation, so please do not produce counterfeit copies!

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1.1



HAT IS REQUIRED ON THE GENERAL TASK 1?

Your examiner will calculate your General Task 1 response after analyzing your performance in 4 categories: *Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resources* and *Grammar*. These sections are very closely related and often performing poorly in one can lead to problematic performance in another.

In the following section, we are going to go over each category and distinguish how a band 6 Task 1 response differs from bands 7 and 8.

Task Achievement

Band 6 writing presents a response that answers all parts of the question but may have inaccurate or unfitting details. Thus, the response may not fully reflect the subjects indicated in the question. Improper tone may also be apparent, which causes awkwardness for the reader while reading the letter.

A band 7 response, however, will fully address the question and its bullet points. There may be some lack of depth in the response, but overall the letter can be labeled 'complete'.

Band 8 students write letters that explain with much greater depth the details of their circumstances. No area of the letter can be labeled 'vague'. All areas communicate fluently and give the reader a complete understanding of the writer's purpose. At the band 8 level, the student's writing should read as fluently as a native English speaker's.

Coherence and Cohesion

This area of the mark refers to the student's ability to write in a manner that communicates a message fluently. Students demonstrate this through the use of good writing structure and *cohesive phrases*. Cohesive phrases are the linking words that join ideas on a sentence and paragraph level (you will learn about this in Chapter 3.1).

At band 6, the message that the student wishes to convey is apparent, but their use

of cohesive devices may be awkward or sound robotic or unnatural. Clarity may be an issue at times, and the examiner may need to reread sentences to understand what the student is trying to say.

Band 7 students will display effective use of several cohesive devices. Although there may be some slight awkwardness at times (due to poor word choices, grammatical issues or illogical structuring), band 7 writing can be read by a native speaker fluently and without extended pauses. The response therefore has a fluidity and rhythm not present at the band 6 level.

Band 8 students show almost no error in their ability to assemble, organize and present logical thoughts. Their writing reads almost seamlessly and the examiner will find it increasingly difficult to distinguish the student's writing from that of a native English speaker.

Lexical Resources

Differences can be seen between the vocabulary and word choices of band 6, 7 and 8 students on Task 1 of their exam.

Band 7 students exhibit a wider understanding of more specialized vocabulary than band 6. Band 7 students will also make fewer mistakes among the prefix and suffix structures they decide to use in their writing. Minor wording errors may be present, but they do not detract from the reader's understanding of the written text.

Band 8 students are next to flawless in their word choices and word structure. Any rare issues that do arise typically affect only very minor word types, such as prepositions.

Grammar

There are clear differences between the grammatical abilities of band 6, 7 and 8 students. Band 7 students are denoted by their ability to construct at least 50% of their sentences without grammatical issue. This quality is not seen at the band 6 level. Further, the grammatical issues that band 7 students have are not so severe as to detract the reader's understanding of the written text.

Band 8 students exhibit the ability to write grammatically sound sentences almost 100% of the time. Their sentence structures do not need to be overly complicated, but they do need to read fluently and use appropriate transition phrases with grammatical accuracy.

For quick reference, the following chart summarizes the above:

Band	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resources	Grammar
9	-indistinguishable from a native English user	-indistinguishable from a native English user	-indistinguishable from a native English user	-indistinguishable from a native English user
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -letter delivers an in-depth response -can be read and understood as though it were written by a native English user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -logical thoughts link seamlessly -rare awkwardness makes it possible to distinguish from a native English user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -almost flawless word choices and usage -rare issues with minor words may be apparent 	-grammatically accurate sentences almost all of the time
7	-fully addresses the essay question but may lack some depth in response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -displays effective use of several cohesive devices -slight awkwardness is present at times -most text can be understood by examiner without having to reread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writer understands and can use specialized vocabulary -prefix and suffix word structures are used with fair accuracy 	-grammatically accurate sentences at least 50% of the time
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -answers all parts of the question but may use inaccurate details or improper tone -lacks in-depth response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writer's message is apparent -cohesive devices sound unnatural -examiner needs to reread parts to fully understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -regular wording mistakes are seen -weakness in specialized vocabulary use is apparent 	-grammatically accurate sentences less than 50% of the time

1.2



UNDERSTANDING THE TASK 1 QUESTION

General Task 1 questions are made up of 3 different parts (please see below). The first is usually 1 sentence long and gives some background information on why the letter is being written. The second part instructs the student to write a letter and often indicates the nature and tone the student is expected to display. The third part of the question shares specific details that the student must elaborate upon. It is important that the student completely understands each section of the question to ensure their answer fulfills it properly.

Background info	{	<i>You have tickets for a sports event but won't be able to attend.</i>
Instruction words	{	<i>Write a letter to a friend offering them the tickets. In your letter, include:</i>
Letter details	{	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>how you got the tickets</i><i>why you can't attend</i><i>why you think your friend will enjoy the event</i>

Even though your question may be on any number of topics, you will most likely need to write one of the following six letter types:

- 1. A letter of request***
- 2. A letter of condolence***
- 3. A letter of appreciation***
- 4. A letter of advice, feedback or suggestion***
- 5. A letter of apology***
- 6. A letter of complaint***

Although a common letter structure is used to respond to all 6 letter types, the lexical resources and tone employed in each varies greatly.

1.3



THE IMPORTANCE OF TONE

In addition to letter types, it is important your letter expresses the right tone. This will be based entirely on the relationship you have with the person you are writing to. There are 2 basic tones you will need to be able to express before engaging your exam: formal and informal.

Although entire books have been written on the differences between formal and informal English, the basics of these styles can be condensed into a few specific qualities:

Formal English

- does not make use of contractions (i.e. can't, won't, haven't)
- avoids colloquialisms and never uses slang
- taps into more complicated lexical resources and wording styles
- uses passive sentence constructions, making it more professional and less personal

Informal English

- permits the use of contractions
- delivers a message in a personal tone and often uses colloquialisms to do so
- uses contextually accurate lexical resources but does not need to deliver these in an overly complicated manner
- uses more active sentence constructions

For example, if you were the manager of a company and needed to write a letter announcing to a small group of your employees that they were going to lose their jobs, you would most likely write a letter of condolence in a formal tone. However, if you were writing a letter to a friend who had just lost a loved one, your letter would be consoling, yet informal.

So to illustrate the above in action, let's say that we were asked to write a letter to a company requesting they reissue the documentation needed for one of their products. Look at the two manners in which we could construct the opening to this letter:

Sample 1

I am writing to request a reissue of the documentation that comes with your GDX 93 model coffee maker. Please allow me to describe my circumstances.

Sample 2

I hope you and your team are doing well. You'll never guess what happened to me the other day. I misplaced the documentation for my GDX 93 model coffee maker! I am writing to see if you would mind reissuing it to me.

I am sure it is clear from these examples that instance 2 is simply too informal to be used in a letter addressed to a company. Thus, writing in this manner would be detrimental to the Task Achievement portion of a student's mark.

Now let's pretend we were asked to write a letter thanking a close friend for a party they hosted the week prior. Look at the following examples and decide which opening would better fit this circumstance:

Sample 1

Please allow this letter to act as my gesture of thanks on behalf of my wife and I for the lovely evening you hosted last week.

Sample 2

My wife and I would like to thank you for the wonderful party you threw last week.

As the recipient of our letter is a friend, we want our words to be affable and endearing, and this is difficult to accomplish using the formal example 1 above. Thus, the friendlier second example would be a better choice.

As the above illustrates, the quality of your tone is a very important element in your letter and must be delivered correctly for you to be successful on the exam.

1.4



LETTER STRUCTURE EXPLAINED

Although the purpose and tone of your IELTS letter may vary, the structure you will follow will not. Because letters address their reader directly, they are structured in a manner that allows them to be extremely concise without sacrificing courtesy.

A complete letter has five parts. You should skip a line between each to ensure it is clear where one part finishes and another begins. The five parts of a letter are:

- 1. *The salutation***
- 2. *The statement of purpose***
- 3. *The situational details***
- 4. *The statement of request***
- 5. *The farewell***

1. The salutation is the greeting portion of the letter. On the IELTS exam, this portion will be written for you. Common salutations you will see on your exam are:

To whom it may concern,

Dear Sir or Madam,

2. The statement of purpose is the short paragraph that you will write to tell your reader why you are writing. This section is typically only 1 or 2 sentences long.
3. The situational details paragraph is the portion of the letter where you will expand and explain the particulars of your position to your reader.
4. The statement of request is the part of the letter where you declare what you hope will be accomplished as a result of your writing.

5. The farewell is the few words you write to close your letter. Tailoring your farewell to the subject of your letter is an additional way to demonstrate your lexical abilities in English to your examiner. Some example farewells are:

Gratefully yours,

Looking forward to your response,

Give my regards to...

Best wishes,

All the best,

See you soon,

To demonstrate these parts in action, please look at the following letter:

Part 1 { Dear Sir/Madam,

Part 2 { I am a third year history student and am writing to you regarding a problem I regularly encounter when I visit the assignment submission desk in the Lorne Building.

Part 3 { Although the Lorne Building is a beautiful and historical campus landmark, it does not provide access to disabled students. As the assignment submission desk is on the ninth floor of the building, my classmate, who is in a wheelchair, is unable to access it. This means that whenever he wishes to hand in an assignment, he must request a classmate do it for him. This, as I am sure you can understand, is both tedious and embarrassing for him.

Part 4 { My friend is much too proud to contact you directly, so I am writing on his behalf. I am requesting that you promptly alter this building in a manner that allows disabled students to access college resources as conveniently as everyone else. Perhaps this could best be accomplished through the installation of an elevator.

Part 5 { I look forward to hearing back from you soon,
Ryan

As you can see, each of the five parts of the letter carries out a specific job. The end result is a cohesive piece of work that delivers a message in a concise manner.

Regarding length, often students think writing extremely long responses of 200 or more words is a strategy that will impress their examiner. This is not the case. Being concise and demonstrating to your examiner that you can express yourself completely in very few words is a better display of your English mastery. Thus, in the lead up to your exam, practice writing in a manner that produces responses of 150 to 170 words. This strategy will also help you conserve time.

2.1



LETTERS OF REQUEST

In this chapter, we are going to look at the 6 major letters types that appear on the IELTS exam and talk about wording choices you can use in each instance. We will also write sample letters for each letter type and analyze how these samples fulfill what the examiner is expecting. Where applicable, demonstrations of tonal differences will be given.

Let's start with letters of request. Letters of request require that the writer asks the recipient carry out a task or favour. In this section, we are going to use the following mock exam questions:

Question 1

Write a letter to a company asking for a refund for something you bought from them online. In your letter include:

- what you bought
- what the problem is
- why you want a refund

Question 2

You are travelling and need someone to do you a favour while you are gone. Write a letter asking a neighbour or friend for help. In your letter include:

- where you are going
- what the favour is
- why you need this friend to help

Following your salutation, your letter will begin with a statement outlining the subject of the request. The tone of this statement may vary depending upon the nature of the letter. As our first mock exam question requires us to write to a company, we are going to use a formal tone. Our second question will be responded to in an informal tone, as it is addressed to a neighbour.

Sample 1

I am writing to you to request you refund a recent online purchase I have made from your company. Allow me to elaborate on exactly why I would like this course of action to be realized.

Sample 2

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I am writing to see if I could ask a favour. Please allow me to elaborate on my situation.

As you can see from the above, both the formal and informal letter styles will state the general reason why the letter is being written. Neither, however, share specific information regarding the request. This information is shared in the *situational details* part of the letter.

Typically, your IELTS Task 1 question will give you some information you can use for the situational details section of the letter, but most of this portion is going to require you be creative. Take the following responses, for example:

Sample 1

I purchased a new tablet computer from your website last month to give to a friend of mine for his birthday. Unfortunately, it appears that he already has the same tablet computer in his office and thus has no need for the one I bought for him. I hope you can empathize with my situation. Having a tablet of my own, I really have no need for the item I purchased from you.

Sample 2

You see, my wife and I are planning to travel next week and have just found out we won't be able to bring our dog, Tiger, with us. Although we were expecting to take him along, arranging his shots and airfare has turned out to be way more expensive than we were anticipating. The trip is a surprise gift from my wife's father, and we only received news of it yesterday. Thus, we did not have the time we needed to arrange proper accommodation for Tiger.

As you can see, the above paragraphs spell out exactly what the nature of the request is and do so at a level of detail much deeper than that found in the opening paragraph.

All that is left now is to write our statement of request outlining exactly what we want from the recipient of the letter.

Sample 1

Thus, I would like to return this item to you for a refund. From your website I understand that if I return the item by mail to you within 60 days of the purchase date, I can expect to have my account credited for the full purchase price.

Sample 2

I was hoping you wouldn't mind putting Tiger up for 3 nights at your place. I know I am not giving you much notice, but the whole situation has really taken us by surprise. I would be so grateful if you could help my wife and I out with this problem.

Some fitting farewells to these letters could be the following:

Gratefully yours,

Thanking you kindly,

Your help greatly appreciated,

Let's read the 2 letters in their entirety. Please note the manner in which the tone changes for each:

Sample 1

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to request you refund a recent online purchase I have made from your company. Allow me to elaborate on exactly why I would like this course of action to be realized.

I purchased a new tablet computer from your website last month to give to a friend of mine for his birthday. Unfortunately, it appears that he already has the same tablet computer in his office and thus has no need for the one I bought for him. I hope you can empathize with my situation. Having a tablet of my own, I really have no need for the item I purchased from you.

Thus, I would like to return this item to you for a refund. From your website I understand that if I send the item by mail to you within 60 days of the purchase date, I can expect to have my account credited for the full purchase price.

Gratefully yours,

Ryan

Sample 2

Dear Sir/Madam,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I am writing to see if I could ask a favour. Please allow me to elaborate on my situation.

You see, my wife and I are planning to travel next week and have just found out we won't be able to bring our dog, Tiger, with us. Although we were expecting to take him along, arranging his shots and airfare has turned out to be way more expensive than we were anticipating. The trip is a surprise gift from my wife's father, and we only received news of it yesterday. Thus, we did not have the time we needed to arrange proper accommodation for Tiger.

I was hoping you wouldn't mind putting Tiger up for 3 nights at your place. I know I am not giving you much notice, but the whole situation has really taken us by surprise. I would be so grateful if you could help my wife and I out with this problem.

Thanking you kindly,

Ryan

Can you see how the letter's tone remains consistent throughout? Can you see how the letter fulfills all portions of the question without going out on unnecessary tangents? These are the sorts of qualities finished letters should have.

2.2



LETTERS OF COMPLAINT

Receiving an IELTS Task 1 question requiring you to make a complaint is not unlikely. In this situation, your language needs to be more forceful and you will need to assess the situation and demand justification. Typically, your letter of complaint will be addressed to some organizational body, and thus your language should remain completely formal. Even in the event you are asked to write a letter of complaint to a neighbour, your language should remain formal.

Let's use the following question throughout this chapter to demonstrate:

Question 1

Write a letter of complaint to a company outlining a problem you had while visiting one of their stores. In your letter include:

- what the problem was
- why this problem has upset you
- what you want to happen as a result of your letter

When starting your letter, be sure to outline exactly what it is you are complaining about:

I feel the need to bring to your attention an issue I have with the manner in which you stage your products. Allow me to elaborate.

Now that we have stated the purpose of our letter, we can go into detail. Remember that you need to be creative in this section, so inventing certain data is required:

Last week, while shopping at your west end location, I noticed that your center was playing an extremely graphic movie to demonstrate the visual capabilities of a new television model. The day I was in your store, my children were exposed to the violence you allowed to be screened. I am aware children are not your company's target market, but you have to acknowledge that they do visit your stores regularly with their parents.

To conclude our letter, we need to state with strength what changes we want to come about as a result of the letter. This section should be both concise and curt to indicate our disappointment with the receiver and our demand for rectification of the situation:

I trust you can empathize with my situation. Thus, I am expecting you to take immediate action by changing the material you use in your displays. I am also expecting you to reprimand the members of your team responsible for allowing such an oversight to happen.

To sign off, the writer should employ a phrase that pushes the receiver for action. The following are a few suggestions:

Expecting your prompt action,

Your timely attention to this matter is needed,

Immediate response required,

In its entirety, the letter reads:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I feel the need to bring to your attention an issue I have with the manner in which you stage your products. Allow me to elaborate.

Last week, while shopping at your west end location, I noticed that your center was playing an extremely graphic movie to demonstrate the visual capabilities of a new television model. The day I was in your store, my children were exposed to the violence you allowed to be screened. I am aware children are not your company's target market, but you have to acknowledge that they do visit your stores regularly with their parents.

I trust you can empathize with my situation. Thus, I am expecting you to take immediate action by changing the material you use in your displays. I am also expecting you to reprimand the members of your team responsible for allowing such an oversight to happen.

Your timely attention to this matter is needed,

Ryan

2.3



LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE

Writing a letter of condolence must be approached with care, as the recipient of the letter is in a fragile state. The utmost sensitivity needs to be employed; improper wording could lead to a letter that does more harm than good. For this section, we will use the following Task 1 question:

A pet belonging to a friend of yours recently passed away. Write a letter to console your friend. In your letter include:

- your condolences
- what kind of animal it was
- something you think will raise your friend's spirits

Keep in mind that a letter of condolence is written to a person who has recently experienced an upsetting event, such as losing a treasured family heirloom or failing to fulfill a dream. When writing to such a person, it is important to state clearly the grief you are experiencing on their behalf and that the sole purpose of your letter is to recognize their pain and help them cope with it. Thus, beginning such a letter with the following works nicely:

I would like to express my deepest condolences to you and your family at this time. I am so grieved by this loss and hope this letter offers you some comfort.

Following this, it is a good idea to present some details that may help the letter's receiver deal with their situation. These details are typically a select few positive traits of the lost entity in question:

I want to share with you some fond memories I have of your dog, Misty. I recall first meeting him in the park and being struck by how obedient he was and how warmly he acted towards strangers. I know how protective he was of your family and how gently he treated your children. You should feel proud of the manner and temperament you bestowed upon him through your training.

Following this, we need to include what we hope comes as a result of this letter:

I hope the memories I have recanted above bring some comfort to you and your family. Misty was a great dog, and I do not believe any of us will ever forget him, nor the happiness he brought to all of those around him.

The final touch is a comforting sign off:

Your friend always,

Remembering Misty,

Putting these sections together gives us our finalized composition:

Dear Mary,

I would like to express my deepest condolences to you and your family at this time. I am so grieved by this loss and hope this letter offers you some comfort.

I want to share with you some fond memories I have of your dog, Misty. I recall first meeting him in the park and being struck by how obedient he was and how warmly he acted towards strangers. I know how protective he was of your family and how gently he treated your children. You should feel proud of the manner and temperament you bestowed upon him through your training.

I hope the memories I have recanted above bring some comfort to you and your family. Misty was a great dog, and I do not believe any of us will ever forget him, nor the happiness he brought to all of those around him.

Your friend always,

Ryan

2.4



LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

A common letter type seen on the IELTS is the letter of appreciation. Like some of the other letter types, this message can be delivered in either a formal or informal tone. To demonstrate both scenarios, we will look at the following sample questions:

Question 1

**You were recently impressed by a staff member at a store.
Write a letter describing your appreciation. In your letter include:**

- what the situation was
- how you were helped
- what you are going to do as a result of this good experience

Question 2

You recently took a trip. In your absence, a friend did you a big favour. Write a letter thanking them. In your letter include:

- what the favour was
- how this favour helped you
- an offer of compensation

Letters of appreciation start with a paragraph outlining what exactly is being recognized:

Sample 1

I am writing to you to express my appreciation for the extra effort exhibited by one of your staff. Their attention to my needs improved my experience with your company tremendously. Allow me to elaborate on what happened.

Sample 2

I want to let you know just how much I appreciate your looking after Kara during my trip to Finland. I'm not sure how much you realize you have helped me.

Following this introduction, details of the situation are presented:

Sample 1

After boarding BrightAir flight BA1OX2, I realized I had left one of my carry on bags in the terminal. As our plane was still at the gate, I notified flight attendant Cathy Burke. Ms. Burke immediately dashed off the plane to retrieve my lost luggage. I was astonished and pleasantly surprised by her concern for my well-being, and I wanted to let you know that she is a member of your team who makes a difference to your customers.

Sample 2

As I have told you before, this past year has been very difficult for me. Being a single parent, it is particularly challenging trying to juggle a demanding career with a child in need of supervision. When I received notice that I would need to take a professional trip to our Scandinavian headquarters, I wasn't sure who I could ask to look after my daughter. You thankfully came to my rescue. Kara expressed how much she enjoyed her time with you, too. You don't know how much it pleased me to return to a happy child!

And just like in our other compositions, we finish our letter of appreciation with what we would like to see happen as a result of our writing.

Sample 1

I hope my letter highlights to you the heightened people skills Ms. Burke brings to your organization. Because of her actions, I will surely fly your airline again and recommend it to all of my friends.

Sample 2

Please let me know if there is some way I can repay you for the kindness you have offered me. Your act of generosity has made such an impression.

To sign off, the following would be fitting:

Sample 1

Your loyal customer,

Gratefully yours,

Sample 2

Thanking you again,

Your friend,

Let's look at both letters in their entirety:

Sample 1

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to express my appreciation for the extra effort exhibited by one of your staff. Their attention to my needs improved my experience with your company tremendously. Allow me to elaborate on what happened.

Basically, after boarding BrightAir flight BA10X2, I realized I had left one of my carry on bags in the terminal. As our plane was still at the gate, I notified flight attendant Cathy Burke. Ms. Burke immediately dashed off the plane to retrieve my lost luggage. I was astonished and pleasantly surprised by her concern for my well-being, and I wanted to let you know that she is a member of your team who makes a difference to your customers.

I hope my letter highlights to you the heightened people skills Ms. Burke brings to your organization. Because of her actions, I will surely fly your airline again and recommend it to all of my friends.

Your loyal customer,

Ryan

Sample 2

Dear Harold,

I want to let you know just how much I appreciate you looking after Kara during my trip to Finland. I'm not sure how much you realize you have helped me.

As I have told you before, this past year has been very difficult for me. Being a single parent, it is particularly challenging trying to juggle a demanding career with a child in need of supervision. When I received notice that I would need to take a professional trip to our Scandinavian headquarters, I wasn't sure whom I could ask to look after my daughter. You thankfully came to my rescue. Kara expressed how much she enjoyed her time with you, too. You don't know how much it pleases me to return to a happy child!

Please let me know if there is some way I can repay you for the kindness you have offered me. Your act of generosity has made such an impression.

Your friend,

Ryan

2.5



LETTERS OF ADVICE, FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS

Letters of this sort are typically written to organizations, and thus should be composed in a formal tone. For the purpose of this section, we will use the following:

Write a letter to your local library suggesting something they could do to improve their facility. In your letter include:

- a recount of a poor experience you had
- what you feel the library should change
- why you feel the library needs alteration

The opening paragraph should mark what the nature of your suggestion is:

I am writing to you to outline an area I feel the Ottawa Public Library could improve. Please allow me to explain.

Following this, you should speak about the details of your advice. As usual, this will likely involve a bit of creativity on your part to expand upon the situational basis you have been given in your IELTS Task 1 question.

While perusing titles in the library this past weekend, I could not help but notice the awkward manner in which various sections are organized. For example, all texts in the multimedia lab are classified by author, while the remaining sections of the library are categorized by title. As you can imagine, this made it extremely difficult for me to track down all the titles I was looking for, as I constantly had to shift my thinking from one categorical system to another. I cannot imagine why the resources are organized in this way.

To conclude our letter, we state what outcome we expect our message to bring. As our letter is only a suggestion, we would not use overly forceful language here:

I am sure that I would not be the only one who would appreciate your library reorganizing its texts to allow for more standardized browsing by its patrons. Thus, I hope you will consider my suggestion and make the necessary changes.

Our farewell should be polite:

Looking forward to hearing back from you,

Thanking you in advance,

Let's look at the letter in its entirety:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to outline an area I feel the Ottawa Public Library could improve. Please allow me to explain.

While perusing titles in the library this past weekend, I could not help but notice the awkward manner in which various sections are organized. For example, all texts in the multimedia lab are classified by author, while the remaining sections of the library are categorized by title. As you can imagine, this made it extremely difficult for me to track down all the titles I was looking for as I constantly had to shift my thinking from one categorical system to another. I cannot imagine why the resources are organized in this way.

I am sure that I would not be the only one who would appreciate your library reorganizing its texts to allow for more standardized browsing by its patrons. Thus, I hope you will consider my suggestion and make the necessary changes.

Thanking you in advance,

Ryan

2.6



LETTERS OF APOLOGY

As this sort of letter is typically addressed to an individual or an organization, this instance is once again one where you will have to judge your question before deciding upon what tone to use in your writing.

For this section, we are going to analyze the following sample Task 1 questions:

Question 1

You were absent from an important event held by the company you work for. Write a letter to apologize for this absence. Your letter should include:

- what the event was
- why the event was important
- why you were absent

Question 2

Your friend invited you to his/her birthday party, but you were unable to attend. Write a letter apologizing for your absence. In your letter:

- state why you could not go
- explain your reason for not contacting your friend sooner
- suggest another time to meet

As with the other letters, we start with a statement of purpose:

Sample 1

I would like to formally apologize for my absence at the annual company retreat this past week. Please allow me to elaborate on why I was not present.

Sample 2

I am writing to express how sorry I am for missing your birthday party last night. Please let me explain what happened.

Following this, details are fleshed out:

Sample 1

I am completely aware of the healthy teambuilding effects these retreats provide us at ActiveCorp, and I truly would not have missed it for anything. However, I was faced with a medical emergency. You see, my appendix ruptured on the day of the retreat. I was immediately rushed to hospital and operated upon within the hour. It was for this reason that I could not contact you to tell you of my plight. Please do not be concerned about my condition. The surgery went very well and I am currently in recovery.

Sample 2

As you know, I would not have missed your party for anything. Unfortunately, however, my wife, Kathy, started to feel ill right before we were about to leave for your place. I would have called to explain the situation to you, but we are in the middle of changing our mobile service providers and have not yet been issued new numbers. Simply put, it was an unfortunate coincidence. Please do not worry about Kathy. She is feeling much better now.

The statement of request closes the letter:

Sample 1

I hope you can grasp the severity of the situation I experienced. I will be back in office this Thursday and will, of course, be present for all future workshops.

Sample 2

I heard your party was memorable, and I really wish my wife and I could have made it. Kathy and I would like to take you out for dinner instead. Please get back to me with a suggested date.

Farewells should be made politely:

Sample 1

Thanking you for your understanding,

Sample 2

Hope to see you soon,

Now let's pull these sections together. Please notice how the different sections of these letters work together:

Sample 1

Dear Sir or Madam,

I would like to formally apologize for my absence at the annual company retreat this past week. Please allow me to elaborate on why I was not present.

I am completely aware of the healthy teambuilding effects these retreats provide us at ActiveCorp, and I truly would not have missed it for anything. However, I was faced with a medical emergency. You see, my appendix ruptured on the day of the retreat. I was immediately rushed to hospital and operated upon within the hour. It was for this reason that I could not contact you to tell you of my plight. Please do not be concerned about my condition. The surgery went very well and I am currently in recovery.

I hope you can grasp the severity of the situation I experienced. I will be back in office this Thursday and will, of course, be present for all future workshops.

Thanking you for your understanding,

Ryan

Sample 2

Dear Ivan,

I am writing to express how sorry I am for missing your birthday party last night. Please let me explain what happened.

As you know, I would not have missed your party for anything. Unfortunately, however, my wife, Kathy, started to feel ill right before we were about to leave for your place. I would have called to explain the situation to you, but we are in the middle of changing our mobile service providers and have not yet been issued new numbers. Simply put, it was an unfortunate coincidence. Please do not worry about Kathy. She is feeling much better now.

I heard your party was memorable, and I really wish my wife and I could have made it. Kathy and I would like to take you out for dinner instead. Please get back to me with a suggested date.

Hope to see you soon,

Ryan

3.1



THE IMPORTANCE OF COHERENCE AND COHESION

As you learned in section 1.1, a fourth of your Task 1 mark will be based upon how well you demonstrate *coherence* and *cohesion* in your letter. *Coherence* is the logical ordering of words allowing the reader to understand the written piece with ease. *Cohesion* is the linking of ideas in a manner that creates clear relationships and logical progressions between them.

Coherence in writing is achieved when a student presents sound grammar, lexical resources and logical progression. Cohesion can be established through the use of *cohesive phrases*. *Cohesive phrases* are word groupings that link the ideas in the composition together. To demonstrate these cohesive phrases in action, let's highlight them in one of the letters we wrote:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you to express my appreciation for the extra effort exhibited by one of your staff. Their attention to my needs improved my experience with your company tremendously. Allow me to elaborate on what happened.

Basically, after boarding BrightAir flight BA10X2, I realized I had left one of my carry on bags in the terminal. As our plane was still at the gate, I notified flight attendant Cathy Burke. Ms. Burke immediately dashed off the plane to retrieve my lost luggage. I was astonished and pleasantly surprised by her concern for my well-being, and I wanted to let you know that she is a member of your team who makes a difference to your customers.

I hope my letter highlights to you the heightened people skills Ms. Burke brings to your organization. Because of her actions, I will surely fly your airline again and recommend it to all of my friends.

Your loyal customer,

Ryan

Can you see how these highlighted phrases tie ideas between sentences and paragraphs? Because of them, no sentence is isolated. All sentences connect in a fluent stream of thought and work towards communicating a common message. Thus, cohesion encourages readability and is a necessary trait of all higher IELTS band compositions.

4.1



TRY IT YOURSELF!

You now should be able to write a letter from start to finish yourself. Read the following question, identify the type of letter you should write and the tone and then commence your message.

Something in an airport delayed you and you have missed your flight. Write a letter to the airport's customer service department. In your letter include:

- what delayed you
- how missing this flight affected you
- what you would like the airport to do about this issue

Dear Sir/Madam,

Try again.

You missed an appointment. Write a letter explaining what happened. In your letter include:

- what the appointment was
- a apology for missing the appointment
- a request to reschedule

Dear Sir/Madam,

IELTS General Task 1: How to write at a band 9 level

Try one more time.

You have a suggestion for a park nearby where you live. Write a letter to your city's council. In your letter include:

- what your suggestion is
- why you think this suggestion will improve the park
- when you would like to see this suggestion in action

Dear Sir/Madam,

IELTS General Task 1: How to write at a band 9 level

5.1



REQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING TASK 1 OF THE GENERAL MODULE IELTS

Q: *Should I print or write in cursive on the exam?*

A: Either is fine, so long as you write legibly and follow proper rules for capitalization.

Q: *How much time should I allot to Task 1?*

A: You should complete your Task 1 writing in 18 minutes, leaving 2 minutes for review before moving on to Task 2.

Q: *Should I skip lines as I write?*

A: Skip a line only between paragraphs.

Q: *Do I need to indent the first line of each of my paragraphs?*

A: No, you do not.

Q: *What is the fastest way to improve my writing?*

A: The absolute fastest way is to get an IELTS instructor to correct your writing. This person can tell you exactly what you need to change to improve.

Q: *I have read that students need to demonstrate complex sentence structures to score well on the exam. Is this true?*

A: Students often confuse *complex sentence structures* with *long sentences*. To score well on the exam, keep your sentences short, grammatically accurate and concise. Doing this and linking your sentences effectively using cohesive phrases will give your writing the complexity it needs to score well. Do not make the mistake of writing extremely long sentences in an effort to impress your examiner. This strategy will likely result in additional grammatical errors, lexical issues and awkward word groupings.

Q: *What should I do if 20 minutes go by and I haven't finished my Task 1 response?*

A: If you have prepared properly this should never happen. In the event that it does, conclude your letter as quickly as you can and move on to Task 2. Task 2 makes up roughly two thirds of your mark, so you must be sure to allot it priority over Task 1.

6.1



REVIEW WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED IN THIS BOOK

Try this brief quiz to ensure you have retained what was taught in this book.

What are the 4 broad categories your examiner will use to grade your Task 1 response?

Name 3 characteristics of formal writing.

What are the 5 parts of a well structured letter?

Write a plausible farewell for a letter of complaint? (Answer will vary.)

What is cohesion?

How much time should be allotted to complete Task 1?

6.2



VIEW WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED IN THIS BOOK (ANSWERS)

Try this brief quiz to ensure you have retained what was taught in this book.

What are the 4 broad categories your examiner will use to grade your Task 1 response?

Task Achievement

Coherence and Cohesion

Lexical Resources

Grammar

Name 3 characteristics of formal writing.

Contractions are not used.

Colloquialisms are employed less frequently.

Messages are delivered using passive writing.

More complicated lexical resources are used.

What are the 5 parts of a well structured letter?

The salutation

The statement of purpose

The situational details

The statement of request

The farewell

Write a plausible farewell for a letter of complaint? (Answer will vary.)

Expecting prompt action,

Your attention to this matter is necessary,

Timely response required,

What is cohesion?

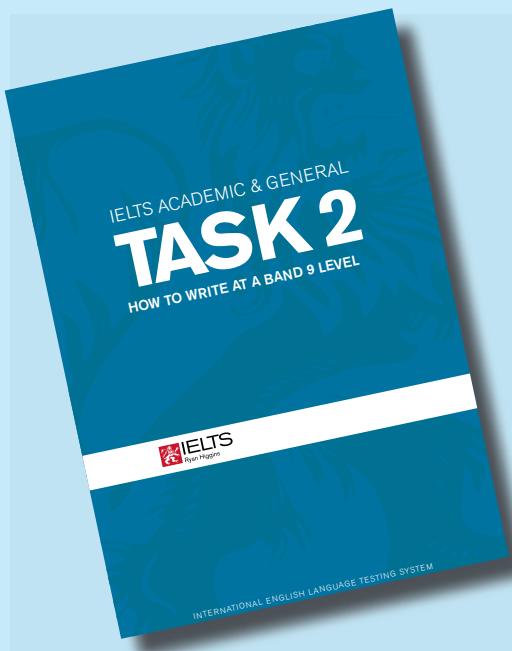
Cohesion is the linking of ideas in a manner that creates clear relationships and logical progressions between them.

How much time should be allotted to complete Task 1?

18 minutes should be allotted to complete the letter and 2 minutes should be allotted for review.

YOU ARE HALF WAY THERE!

You've maximized your score on Task 1,
now do the same for Task 2!



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BOUT THE AUTHOR

Born and raised in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Ryan began his teaching career tutoring English to newly arrived Canadian immigrants. After finishing university, he relocated to Dubai in the summer of 2005 and started teaching IELTS essay writing at a number of international universities. His work with many students in preparation for their IELTS exams led him to realize that there were very few quality IELTS writing resources available free of charge online. With some encouragement from his students, he compiled all essential IELTS writing information into a series of tutorial videos and made these videos available for Internet viewing. Since then, Ryan's videos have been viewed over 4 million times and his IELTS writing strategies have been used with success the world over.

In 2007, Ryan relocated to Shanghai, China. He currently lives with his wife in Doha, Qatar.

