

**WORDSMITH IELTS**

**GENERAL MODULE**

**LETTER WRITING TIPS AND RESOURCE**

PROPERTY OF WORDSMITH IELTS

(TO BE RETURNED AFTER USE)

## General Training Task 1 Overview

In task 1 of the General Training paper you will have 20 minutes to write a letter. Your letter should be at least 150 words.

Below are possible situations and letters you might be asked to write about:

- Letter of complaint
- Application or resignation letter
- Inviting a friend or colleague to join you at an event or social occasion
- Making a request
- Making formal arrangements
- Explaining something to a friend or colleague
- Making an apology

Below are some example questions:

You have recently started work in a new company.

Write a letter to an English-speaking friend. In your letter

- explain why you changed jobs
- describe your new job
- tell him/her your other news

On a recent holiday you lost a valuable item. Fortunately you have travel insurance to cover the cost of anything lost.

Write a letter to the manager of your insurance company. In your letter

- describe the item you lost
- explain how you lost it
- tell the insurance company what you would like them to do

You are working for a company. You need to take some time off work and want to ask your manager about this.

Write a letter to your manager. In your letter

- explain why you want to take time off work
- give details of the amount of time you need
- suggest how your work could be covered while you are away

# Frequently Asked Questions

1. Should I write the address and date like a normal letter?

No, in the test there is no reason to do either of these things.

2. Are paragraphs important?

Yes, very important. See below for a structure I tell all of my General Training students to use. You should also skip a line between paragraphs to make it very clear to the examiner.

3. How many main ideas should I include?

The question will give you a reason to write the letter and 3 bullet points with information you must include. You should therefore have 4 main ideas: why you are writing the letter and the three bullet points. You should have one paragraph only for one main idea.

You were hurt in a minor accident inside a supermarket, and you wish to complain to the supermarket.

Write a letter to the manager of the supermarket. In your letter

- say who you are
- give details about the accident
- suggest how the supermarket could prevent similar accidents.

In this example we would have to mention 4 things: why you are writing (to complain), who you are, details of the accident and how the supermarket could prevent similar accidents.

4. Can I use words and phrases from the question?

No, you should avoid this. Instead, you should use synonyms and paraphrasing to vary your language.

5. Should I finish letters on the right or left?

It is normal to end letters on the left in the UK. Please do this, even if it is not customary in your culture to do so.

6. Should I sign my name at the end?

There is no need to do this. Just write your first name for an informal or semi-formal letter and both your first and family name for formal letters.

## Common Mistakes and Solutions

1. It is difficult to tell what the main purpose of the letter is.

**Solution–** Your first paragraph should clearly state why you are writing the letter.

2. Not covering all the bullet points sufficiently.

**Solution–** Make a plan like I advise below and this will help you remember to include everything you need.

3. Poor Paragraphing.

**Solution–** Remember that there should be 4 main ideas in your letter and they should each have their own separate paragraph. Skip a line between paragraphs.

4. Not using the correct tone.

**Solution- Identify** if the letter requires a formal, informal or semi-formal tone. This will depend on who you are writing to, the situation and whether you know the name of the person or not. See my tips below for more information on how to do this.

5. Letter is difficult to understand.

**Solution–** Use the structure I advise below and keep your ideas simple.

# Task 1 Letter Writing Tips

## 1. Make a Plan

All of my students who get above a band 7 in writing all have one thing in common- they plan before they write. I know that it takes a little extra time, but it will actually save you time because you will know exactly what to write and you will not get lost.

Writing without a plan is like trying to drive to a strange place without a map. You will get lost and have to stop and ask for directions.

Remember that you will have to state why you are writing and then cover the three bullet points. Here is a basic structure that will help you plan your letters:

Dear X

**Paragraph 1**– Explain why you are writing the letter

**Paragraph 2**– Bullet point 1

**Paragraph 3**– Bullet point 2

**Paragraph 4**– Bullet point 3

Closing remark (e.g. I look forward to hearing from you etc.)

Ending (Yours sincerely, Kind regards, All the best etc.)

Your name

This structure should not change and the only thing you will have to think about is using the correct style, fulfilling the aim of the letter and filling in the details.

## 2. Use the Correct Style

One of the keys to a high band score is using the appropriate style, formal, semi-formal or informal.

The question will tell you the situation and should indicate if you are writing to a friend, colleague or someone you don't know.

If you have never met the person before and you don't know their first or last name, then you should use a **formal** style. You should definitely use a formal tone for letters of application and when making complaints. Formal styles allow us to sound respectful and professional; however, if we use this tone with someone we know it can often sound cold or unfriendly.

If the person is a friend then you should use an **informal** style. With people we know well, we don't need to sound too formal and the letter should have a relaxed tone.

**Semi-formal** is often the one that confuses people. Semi-formal is used when you know the name of the person, but it is within a professional or official context. Imagine writing a letter to a colleague or someone from a different company you know. If you write in a formal style it will sound unfriendly, but informal might sound disrespectful. In this situation we should use a semi-formal style.

We will look at the different grammar and vocabulary you should use for each style of writing below.

## 3. Answer the Whole Question

The question will always have three bullet points and you are expected to cover all three of these in your letter. A good thing to do is to separate them into three separate paragraphs and then you know that you have properly answered the question.

Some points may take longer to write about than other, but you should avoid writing 5-6 sentences about one point and then only one sentence about the other two.

You were hurt in a minor accident inside a supermarket, and you wish to complain to the supermarket.

Write a letter to the manager of the supermarket. In your letter

- say who you are
- give details about the accident
- suggest how the supermarket could prevent similar accidents.

In this example we will obviously write less for the first bullet point than the second and third, but it does not mean we shouldn't include it.

#### 4. **Boost Your Grammar Score With Complex Sentences**

Grammar is one of the four areas you will be assessed on and gaining high marks in this area is not just about making sure you don't make any mistakes, but also using a range of appropriate tenses and complex sentences.

**Complex sentences are not really all that complex.** A simple sentence contains just one clause and one idea, for example. 'I'm sorry I couldn't come to your party.' and 'I was sick on the day of your party.'

A complex sentence has more than one clause in it and we can make them by combining more than one clause or idea in a sentence. If we combine the sentences in the previous paragraph together it might look like this 'I'm sorry I couldn't come to your party because I was sick that day.' As you can see, they are not so complex.

To help you make complex sentences, think of the ideas you need to include in your letter at the planning stage and then think about how you could combine some of these in complex sentences.

#### 5. **Use the Correct Tense**

The questions will be designed so that you have to use a range of tenses. In other words, the examiner will be testing your ability to write in a variety of tenses.



If we look at the first example above, you will notice that there are several different tenses we should use:

- Explain why you changed jobs (past )
- Describe your new job (present)
- Tell him or her your other news (could be past or present, but also a good opportunity for you to show the examiner that you know how to use future structures)

Try to make a plan before you write and mark which tenses you will use in the plan.

## 6. **Begin and End Your Letter Correctly**

There are a number of different ways you can start and finish your letter, but here are the ways I advise my students:

**Formal and you don't know the name:**

Dear Sir/Madam

Yours faithfully

**Formal and you do know the name:** (For e.g., Managers)

Dear [Mr(s). Family Name]

Yours sincerely

**Semi-Formal:**

Dear [Mr. Family name]

Kind regards

**Informal:**

Dear [First Name]

Best wishes

## **7. Go Over the Word Limit**

Part of answering the question correctly is writing at least 150 words. The examiner will count every word, so don't think you can get away with just writing around 150 words, it must be more or you will lose marks, but don't go more than 165 – 170 because it might affect your time management and you could commit more mistakes by writing too much.

You will not have time to count how many words you have, so the best thing to do is practice with the official IELTS exam paper and count how many words you write on that. You will then be able to see how much of your writing 150 words looks like.

Try to write about 10% over 150 words when you are practicing and this will help you in the exam.

## **8. Follow the 100% Rule**

The biggest mistake students make in the IELTS writing test is trying to show off their grammar and vocabulary. By 'show off' I mean that they try to use very complex grammar and vocabulary. This is fine if your English is at a very high level, but not so good if it means you make lots of mistakes.

It is much better to use simple language and use it correctly, than using complex words and phrases and making lots of mistakes.

For this reason, I suggest you follow the 100% rule. If you are not 100% sure about the grammar or vocabulary you have just written, delete it and write it in a simpler way.

Also, make sure you leave yourself 2 or 3 minutes to check your spelling and grammar at the end.

Finally, have someone check your writing and identify your common mistakes. You can then concentrate on fixing them.

## **9. Don't Be Overly Informal**

You might be asked to write to a friend, but that doesn't mean you should stop using correct grammar and spelling.

Avoid using abbreviations like 'cus' instead of 'because' or 'u ' instead of 'you'.

You should also never use text message style acronyms like 'LOL' or 'OMG'.

Emoticons are also not allowed

## **10. Ideas Should Be Relevant But Don't Have To Be Amazing**

You will have to think of some ideas and supporting details but don't worry, these do not need to be interesting or amazing, they just need to be relevant.

For example in this question you will have to explain why you need to take time off work. Don't try to impress the examiner a wonderfully dramatic story, just keep it simple e.g. family or health problems.

# How To Write a Formal IELTS Letter

This will show you how to write a formal letter in task 1 of the IELTS writing test. This post is for students doing the General Training module. For those of you taking the Academic module, please return to the task 1 page for more articles.

This post will

- show you how to analyze a task 1 question
- show you how to make a plan that will save you lots of time and boost your mark
- suggest some useful language
- provide you with a quick task 1 checklist
- give you a sample band 9 answer

## Is it a formal letter?

The first thing you need to do is decide if the question is actually asking you to write a formal or informal letter.

We can tell this by checking if we know the name of the person we are writing to or not and the situation. For example, if we are writing a letter of complaint, applying for a new job or resigning from our existing job, it will always be formal. Also, if we do not know the name of the person we are writing to, then it will be formal.

Take a look at the four example questions below and decide which two are formal.

On a recent holiday you lost a valuable item. Fortunately you have travel insurance to cover the cost of anything lost.

Write a letter to the manager of your insurance company. In your letter

- describe the item you lost
- explain how you lost it
- tell the insurance company what you would like them to do

You are working for a company. You need to take some time off work and want to ask your manager about this.

Write a letter to your manager. In your letter

- explain why you want to take time off work
- give details of the amount of time you need
- suggest how your work could be covered while you are away

You were hurt in a minor accident inside a supermarket, and you wish to complain to the supermarket.

Write a letter to the manager of the supermarket. In your letter

- say who you are
- give details about the accident
- suggest how the supermarket could prevent similar accidents.

You have recently started work in a new company.

Write a letter to an English-speaking friend. In your letter

- explain why you changed jobs
- describe your new job
- tell him/her your other news

The first and third questions are formal. We don't know the name of the managers and they are formal situations.

The second question does not give us the name of the manager and would, therefore, be a formal letter.

The last letter is to a friend and must be informal.

## Planning a Formal Letter

People don't normally plan letters but in the IELTS test you really should. In fact, I have met very few students who wrote a band 9 letter and didn't make a plan before writing.

As you can see above, all task 1 questions on the General Training paper follow the same format. They will first tell you the situation (the reason why you are writing) and then give you three bullet points that you have to cover. This is good news for us because it means we can follow the same structure every time.

Here is the formal letter structure I tell all of my General Training IELTS students to follow.

**Dear Sir/Madam**

**Paragraph 1- Say why you are writing to them. (*I am writing with regard to...*)**

**Paragraph 2- Bullet point 1 and supporting details**

**Paragraph 3- Bullet point 2 and supporting details**

**Paragraph 4- Bullet point 3 and supporting details**

**I look forward to hearing from you.**

**Yours faithfully**

**[Your Full Name]**

That's it. It will take you only a few minutes to write this out in the exam and then all you have to do is think of the supporting details.

When thinking of supporting details don't worry about being entertaining or even thinking of the best ideas you can, just make sure they are relevant.

## Useful Language

Below is a selection of useful language for you to use in a formal letter. The phrases you choose will depend on the context of the question.

### Beginning

- I am writing this letter with regard to...
- I am writing to bring to your attention...
- I am writing to inform you that...
- I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with....

### Requests and Suggestions

- I would be grateful if you would...
- I would like you to...
- I am entitled to request that you....
- I was wondering if it would be at all possible to....
- I would like to suggest that....

### Ending

- I look forward to hearing from you.
- I look forward to receiving your response.
- I await your prompt service.
- I thank you for your consideration.
- Please respond at the earliest convenience.

## IELTS Letter Writing Checklist

Here are some questions you should ask yourself when answering any General Training task 1 question.

1. Have I read and understood the instructions?
2. Is it a formal or informal letter?
3. Have I made a plan?

4. Have I included both the reason for writing and the 3 bullet points?
5. Have I supported each bullet point with relevant details?
6. Have I used appropriate language?
7. Have I separated my letter into paragraphs?
8. Are my ideas clear and easy to understand?
9. Have I avoided copying the question and varied my vocabulary?
10. Have I checked my letter for grammar and spelling mistakes?

If you can answer all of these questions you are well on your way to writing a good formal letter.

## **Band 9 Sample Formal Letter**

**On a recent holiday you lost a valuable item. Fortunately, you have travel insurance to cover the cost of anything lost.**

**Write a letter to the manager of your insurance company. In your letter**

- **describe the item you lost**
- **explain how you lost it**
- **tell the insurance company what you would like them to do**

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to inform you that I recently lost my digital camera while on holiday in Vietnam.

The camera is a black Canon 70d and costs \$1550 when I bought it new last month. It has a resolution of 20 megapixels, a Canon 67 millimeter lens and was in a brown leather case with my name on it.

I lost it when I was having coffee with my husband in the backpacker area of Ho Chi Minh City. I believe the coffee shop was called Highlands Coffee and it was on Pham Ngu Lao Street. We had been at the coffee shop for around 45 minutes when I noticed it was missing.

I am entitled to make a claim for the value of the above mentioned item and request that you send me details on what I need to do to in order to proceed.



I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully

John Smith

(162 words)

## **Examiner's Report**

This candidate has fully answered the question by covering both the purpose of the letter and the three bullet points in the question. The candidate has also used the appropriate formal tone. All ideas are supported with relevant details.

The ideas are clear and well organised. Paragraphing has been used well.

Vocabulary is both accurate and appropriate. Words such as digital, resolution, backpacker and claim show a high level of vocabulary.

The candidate has used a range of tenses (present simple, present perfect, present continuous, past continuous and past simple) and all sentences are error-free.

Band 9.

# How To Write an Informal IELTS Letter

Here we will show you how to write an informal IELTS letter to a friend in task 1 of the General Training module.

In Task 1 of the General Training module, you will be asked to write a letter to someone. This could be a formal or informal letter.

This post will:

- help you tell the difference between formal and informal
- help you plan your letter and give you an appropriate format to follow
- give you lots of useful language
- provide you with a checklist for all informal IELTS letters
- show you a band 9 sample answer

## Is it an informal letter?

The only time you will be writing an informal letter is if the instructions tell you to write to 'a friend'. In all other situations you will either write a formal letter. Look at the four examples below and pick the one which is informal.

You were hurt in a minor accident inside a supermarket, and you wish to complain to the supermarket.

Write a letter to the manager of the supermarket. In your letter

- say who you are
- give details about the accident
- suggest how the supermarket could prevent similar accidents.

You are working for a company. You need to take some time off work and want to ask your manager about this.

Write a letter to your manager. In your letter

- explain why you want to take time off work
- give details of the amount of time you need
- suggest how your work could be covered while you are away

On a recent holiday you lost a valuable item. Fortunately you have travel insurance to cover the cost of anything lost.

Write a letter to the manager of your insurance company. In your letter

- describe the item you lost
- explain how you lost it
- tell the insurance company what you would like them to do

You have recently started work in a new company.

Write a letter to an English-speaking friend. In your letter

- explain why you changed jobs
- describe your new job
- tell him/her your other news

The first and third letters are to someone we don't know and they are therefore formal.

In the second letter, you are writing to your manager. Many people are friends with their managers, but please disregard this when writing IELTS letters. In this case, 'manager' is the same as colleague or co-worker and the letter will, therefore, be formal.

The last letter specifically mentions 'friend' and we can, therefore, use an informal tone.

You could say that IELTS are trying to trick you with this letter because they want you to write about a work related topic, but don't allow them to trick you. When it says 'write a letter to a friend', make sure you always use informal language.

# Informal Letter Format

The format of every General Training IELTS question is the same. They will always tell you why you are writing the letter (the context), tell you who to write to (in this case, a friend) and give you three bullet points that you have to cover. This is great for us because we can use a standard structure when planning and writing our lessons.

## Planning an Informal IELTS Letter

It might seem like a waste of valuable time, but planning is an essential part of the IELTS writing paper. Most people don't plan and they normally get lost in the middle of their writing and waste lots of time trying to make their writing clear and organised. Remember that your letter must be well organised and easy to read and a plan will really help you with this and actually save you time.

Below is the structure I advise all of my General Training IELTS students to follow when doing task 1.

**Dear [First name only of friend]**

**Paragraph 1- Say why you are writing to them (I'm just writing to let you know that....)**

**Paragraph 2- Bullet point 1 and supporting details**

**Paragraph 3- Bullet point 2 and supporting details**

**Paragraph 4- Bullet point 3 and supporting details**

**Looking forward to hearing from you soon.**

**All the best**

**[Your first name only]**

You shouldn't need to change this structure and you can use it again and again for any informal task 1 answer. Try making a plan before you start writing and use it to plan your answers. All you have to do then is think of the supporting details for paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 and write your answer.

## Informal Language

Informal language does not mean you can relax and write like you would in a text message to a friend. Remember that this is an English test and your grammar and spelling will have to be correct.

Avoid using abbreviations like 'luv' or 'bcuz'. Also, don't use acronyms like 'LOL' or 'OMG' and never use emoticons

**It is a good idea to use contractions like 'I've', 'I'd' and 'I'm'. This is one of the ways that you can show the examiner that you know how to write an informal letter.**

Below is a range of informal language that you can use in your informal letters. Which ones you use will depend on the context.

### Stating Purpose

I'm just writing to let you know that....

I'm writing to tell you about....

### Apologising

I'm very sorry about.....

I'd like to apologise for....

### **Asking for help**

I'd be really grateful if you could.....

I was wondering if you would give me a hand with.....

I was wondering if you would do me a favour.

### **Expressing Satisfaction**

I was over the moon to hear about....

I was thrilled to find out that/about.....

### **Giving bad news**

I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news for you.

### **Ending**

All the best.

Keep in touch.

## **Informal Letter Writing Checklist**

Here are some questions you should ask yourself when trying to write an informal IELTS letter.

1. Have I read and thought about the instructions carefully?
2. Am I sure that this is an informal letter?
3. Have I done a plan?
4. Have I covered both the reason for writing and the 3 bullet points?
5. Have I supported each bullet point with relevant details?
6. Have I used informal language?
7. Have I used paragraphing correctly?
8. Are my ideas easy to understand?
9. Have I avoided copying the word in the question and varied my vocabulary?
10. Have I checked my letter for grammar and spelling mistakes?

# Band 9 Sample Informal Letter

You have recently started work in a new company.

Write a letter to an English-speaking friend. In your letter

- explain why you changed jobs
- describe your new job
- tell him/her your other news

Dear Tom

I'm just writing to let you know that I quit my old job and found something new.

I was really fed up with being a brain surgeon because it wasn't really much of a challenge anymore. You know me; if I'm not learning new tricks, I get bored too easily and have to find something new.

I'm now teaching English as a foreign language in Vietnam and it suits me down to the ground. I teach two adult classes and a kindergarten class, which is not only challenging but also rewarding. Can you believe it?

I also have some other amazing news- I'm getting married. She was one of my first ever students and I guess it was love at first sight for both of us. Make sure you keep the first weekend in July free, so you can come and celebrate with us.

Keep in touch.

Chris

(150 words)

## IELTS Writing Sample Letters

In **Task 1 of the IELTS General Writing** section, you must write a letter about a given situation. This letter will be one of the following types:

Style	Characteristics	Opening	Ending
Formal	To someone you have not met, whose name you don't know	Dear Sir / Madam	Yours faithfully
Semi-formal	To someone you may or may not have met, whose last name you know & use	Dear Mr Brown, Dear Ms Stone	Yours sincerely
Informal	To someone you know well, whose first name you know and use	Dear John Dear Anita	Best regards Warm wishes

Each kind of letter requires a different style of writing, a specific beginning and ending salutation, formal or informal expressions and varying types of grammatical forms. As you read through the **sample IELTS letters** below, take note of how they vary depending on the level of familiarity with the person being written to. Practice writing your own letters from **sample letter topics**, until you can produce all three kinds of letters easily and quickly. Then, you will be able to complete this task effectively and easily on the day of your IELTS exam.

Also, every General IELTS Writing Task 1 includes three bulleted points which you need to mention in your letter. Make sure you include these three points or else you will not get high marks, no matter how well you write.

### GENERAL IELTS WRITING TASK 1 SAMPLE LETTERS

## IELTS Formal Letter Samples-

### 001 - Complaining to a Hotel

Below is a sample letter response to **Task 1 of the General IELTS Writing Section**. It is a **formal** letter, which can be identified in several ways:

- the tone, which is official, business-like and serious
- the use of Dear Sir / Madam
- the absence of contractions
- the use of formal expressions (I am writing in connection with...)
- the closing salutation ( "Yours faithfully" instead of the more informal "Yours sincerely" or "Best regards")



## GENERAL WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

**You recently stayed in a hotel in a large city. The weather was very unusual for the time of year and the heating / cooling system in the hotel was quite inadequate.**

**Write a letter to the manager of the hotel. In your letter:**

- **give details of what went wrong**
- **explain what you had to do to overcome the problem at the time**
- **say what action you would like the manager to take**

You should write at least 150 words.

You do NOT need to write your own address.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

### Answer

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing in connection with my recent stay at the Four Seasons in London, England. Unfortunately, due to a malfunctioning heater in my room, I spent three miserable nights at your hotel from April 26 to 29, 2010.

When I arrived in London, there was an unexpected snowstorm. I understand it does not usually snow in April; however, when I got to my room, there was no heat. After complaining, a technician was sent up, who informed me they had to install a new heating unit. When I asked to be moved to another room, I was told the hotel was completely booked. Unfortunately, each night after work I returned to discover the problem had not been rectified.

Eventually, I spent three horribly uncomfortable nights, wearing my coat to bed, wearing socks around the room and ending up with a bad cold from the unheated room. I had no time to complain as I had to catch a flight home right after my conference.

I am shocked by this terrible service. This is not what anyone expects for \$400 a night! To compensate me for this tremendous inconvenience, I ask that you refund my money right away and offer me a free, more comfortable stay in one of your finer suites in the future. If not, I am prepared to take my complaint to a higher authority.

I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest,

Yours faithfully,  
Mr John McFee

## *Explaining to a Bank*

Below is a sample letter response to **Task 1 of the General IELTS Writing Section**. It is a **formal** letter, which can be identified in several ways:

- the tone, which is formal and business-like and serious
- the use of Dear Sir / Madam
- the absence of contractions
- the use of formal expressions ("Thank you kindly in advance.")
- the closing salutation ( "Yours faithfully", etc.)

## GENERAL WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

**You have received a letter from your bank, asking you to acknowledge receipt of a new bank card. However, the card was missing from the envelope.**

**Write a letter to the bank's head office. In your letter:**

- **explain why you are writing**
- **express concern about the missing card**
- **ask them what they intend to do**

Write at least 150 words.

You do NOT need to write any address.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing in connection with a missing or stolen debit card from your bank. This is an urgent matter as the bank card could prove dangerous in the hands of the wrong person.

Just yesterday, I received a letter from your bank's head office. It stated that my new bank card was enclosed and asked me to acknowledge receipt. However, when the envelope arrived in my mailbox, it was in a tattered state.

More importantly, the debit card which was supposed to be included, was missing. I checked and rechecked around the mailbox, but found nothing. I am concerned that someone has gone through my mail and possibly stolen the card.

For this reason, I request that you cancel the existing debit card immediately. The debit card in question is related to my account number 64729401 at your Bay and Bloor branch. After it has been cancelled, please arrange to send me a new one, as I need to travel overseas next week and will need to carry the new bank card with me.

Thank you kindly in advance,

Yours faithfully,  
Ms Brenda Holster  
(172 words)

## *Sample Semi-formal IELTS Letter 1 - Requesting a Letter of Reference*

Below is a sample letter for **Task 1 of the General IELTS Writing Section**. It is a **semi-formal** letter, which can be identified in several ways:

- the tone, which is a mix of politeness and warmth
- the use of the last names (Dear Mrs Sweeney)
- the absence of contractions
- the use of formal expressions (I would appreciate it if...)
- the closing salutation (Yours sincerely)

## WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

**You are applying for a job and need a letter of reference from someone who knew you when you were at school.**

**Write a letter to one of your old teachers asking for a reference. In your letter:**

- **say what job you have applied for**
- **explain why you want this job**
- **suggest what information the teacher should include**

Write at least 150 words.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Answer:

Dear Mrs. Sweeney,

How are you? I hope everything is fine at the school and that you have been well. I still remember the dynamic way in which you taught grammar to me and all of the teacher trainees in your English class. Thanks again for those important lessons.

I am writing in connection with a letter of reference that I need for a job that I have applied for recently. As I am due to graduate next month, I have applied for a position as an ESL teacher at a private language school in Tokyo, Japan.

You might remember my telling you how very much I looked forward to teaching and traveling around the world. Now, I have the chance. I am confident that I can make a difference in the lives of students who need to learn English.

In the letter of reference, I would appreciate it if you could include information related to my trustworthiness, my enthusiasm and my cross-cultural awareness while in teacher training college. As the job is in Japan, they do not have the chance to interview me and will base their decision largely on my letters of reference. I would need to have the letter in two weeks, by July 1st.

Thank you kindly in advance,

Yours sincerely,

Grace Smith

## *Sample IELTS semi-formal Letter 2 - 006 - Complaining to a Landlord*

Below is a sample letter for **Task 1 of the General IELTS Writing Section**. It is a **semi-formal** letter, which can be identified in several ways:

- the tone, which is a mix of formality plus warmth
- the use of the last names (Dear Mr Shah)
- the absence of contractions
- the use of formal expressions (I would appreciate it if...)
- the closing salutation (Yours sincerely)

## WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

**You have been living in a rental apartment for the past year. Recently a new neighbour moved in and has been making a lot of noise, which disturbs you.**

Write a letter to the landlord. In your letter:

- **explain the situation**
- **describe why it bothers you**
- **suggest a solution**

Write at least 150 words.

You do NOT need to write any address.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Mr Shah,

I hope you and your family are all well. I am writing in connection with a problem I have with the new tenant, Jack, who has moved in downstairs.

The issue is that Jack is a professional musician who plays his electric guitar late into the night. I understand he is in a band and needs to practice; however, I think he cannot do so in a residential building such as ours.

As I mentioned to you when I signed the lease to the apartment, I am a full-time writer who works from home. For me, it is essential to have silence so I can concentrate on my work. With Jack playing at all hours, I have been unable to get any of my writing done, except when he is out. In some cases, I have even been forced to leave the apartment and work at a nearby coffee shop or library as the guitar playing was causing such a disturbance.

I would appreciate it if you could speak to Jack and ask him to turn down the volume on his guitar or else to use headphones. I have spoken to him about it, but to no avail. I will let you know as soon as the situation improves.

Thank you kindly in advance and please give my best regards to your family,

Yours sincerely,

Meg Snyder

## *Sample IELTS Informal Letter - Thanking & Inviting a Friend*

Below is a sample letter for **Task 1 of the General IELTS Writing Section**. It is an **informal** letter, which can be identified in several ways:

- the tone, which is warm, easy-going and conversational
- the use of first names (Ajay, Sunita, Carol)
- the use of contractions (I've, don't, can't)
- the use of informal expressions ("Thanks", instead of "Thank you")
- the closing salutation ( "Warm wishes", instead of the more formal "Yours sincerely" or "Yours faithfully")

### **WRITING TASK 1**

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

**Last month you had a holiday overseas where you stayed with some friends. They have just sent you some photos of your holiday.**

**Write a letter to your friends. In your letter:**

- **thank them for the photos and for the holiday**
- **explain why you didn't write earlier**
- **invite them to come and stay with you**

Write at least 150 words.

You do NOT need to write any address.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

ANSWER:

Dear Ajay and Sunita,

Thanks so much for your kind letter and the lovely photos of my holiday in Mumbai. Sorry for the delay in acknowledging your mail, but your package arrived just as I was about to leave town on a business trip. I've just returned to Toronto today.

Looking at the photos brings back so many happy memories of the times we spent together and the wonderful hospitality you extended to me. I felt completely pampered by both of you! You surrounded me with warm friends, good food, amazing sights, great shopping, unforgettable cultural events and laughter-filled evenings. I would have been lost without you. I can't thank you enough.

These good memories gave me an idea. I know you've always wanted to visit Canada. Why don't you plan a holiday and stay with me this summer? The weather is great at that time of year, all tourist sites are open and I could take two weeks off from work. Aside from seeing Toronto, we could drive to Niagara Falls, Thousand Islands, Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec City. I would be thrilled if you could make it.

Thank you both again for the beautiful holiday and the photos which are already up on my wall. Now, I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Warm wishes,

Carol

(216 words)

## *Sample IELTS Letter - Advising a Friend*

Below is a sample letter for **Task 1 of the General IELTS Writing Section**. It is an **informal** letter, which can be identified in several ways:

- the tone, which is very warm, personal and friendly
- the use of first names ( Julie, Irene)
- the use of contractions (I'm, you're, can't)
- the use of informal expressions (Thanks, Write soon)
- the closing salutation ( Warm Regards, instead of the more formal "Yours sincerely" or "Yours faithfully")

### WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

**An English-speaking friend wants to spend a two-week holiday in your region and has written asking for information and advice. Write a letter to your friend. In your letter,**

- **offer to find somewhere to stay**
- **give advice about what to do**
- **give information about what clothes to bring**

Write at least 150 words.

You do NOT need to write any address.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Dear Julie,

Thanks so much for your latest letter. I'm really excited to hear that you're planning to visit Toronto. It will give me a chance to take you around, as you did so kindly for me when I was in Amsterdam last year.

Regarding your visit, I would be happy to help in any way possible. First, unless you really like freezing weather, I suggest you come in the summer months of July or August. Though most hotels are expensive at that time, we have some wonderful guest suites available in our high-rise building, for only about \$50 per night. They are fully furnished studio apartments, with a kitchen, so you can have the option of eating in. Just let me know your dates and I can make a reservation for you.

Summer is also the time when all the tourist sites are open. We can visit Centre Island, Canada's Wonderland, Niagara Falls, the CN Tower, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Science Centre and Thousand Islands. The weather should be warm and comfortable, around 25 - 30 degrees Celsius, so bring your informal summer clothes, a swimsuit and an umbrella too. We do get summer showers quite often.

I can't wait for you to come! Write soon with more details,  
Warm wishes  
Irene

### **Here are some tips for organizing your ideas in IELTS letters:**

- 1. Make sure the main purpose of the letter is clear from the beginning to the end.**
  - a. Open the letter with a short explanation of the purpose and close the letter with a call to action that relates to this purpose.
- 2. Each body paragraph should be about one central subject indicated by the task bullet points.**
  - a. Let the first sentence of the paragraph communicate the subject in some way.
  - b. Either indent the first line of each paragraph or separate the paragraphs from each other with a space.
- 3. Think about how your sentences relate to each other and use your words to clearly guide the reader from one thought to the next.**

For example, where appropriate:

- a. Use sequencers - "To begin with . . . Finally, . . ."

- b. Introduce your ideas with markers - “The reason why I need time off . . . The solution to this problem is . . . .”
  - c. Use specific linking words to show contrast, similarity, cause - “similarly, however, as a result . . .”
4. **Avoid repeating key nouns in your answer. Don’t be boring and repetitive - you want to show that you have a variety of words in your vocabulary bank.**
- a. Think of synonyms for words that you are repeating (the problem, this issue, these complications, another annoyance . . .)
  - b. Use pronouns (he, they, these . . .)

### Sample Question and Model Answer

**You recently ordered a small item online but when it arrived it was damaged.**

**Write a letter to the company that sold you the item:**

- give details about the order you made
- explain what was wrong with the item
- tell the company what you want them to do about it

Dear Sir or Madam:

Three weeks ago I ordered a hat from your online store. I was excited when it arrived but very disappointed to find that the rim was bent and damaged making the hat unwearable.

In relation to the specifics of the order, I purchased this accessory through your website called Hats of all Sizes on January 14th using my PayPal account. The order number is 257380 and I am attaching a copy of my receipt.

The main issue with the cap is that the visor has been completely bent out of shape. I believe this is because of the way in which it was packaged. It was delivered in an envelope and as a result, may have been crushed by heavier boxes during delivery. I have spoken to the delivery company but they do not take any responsibility and blame the packaging.

As a solution, and because I really like the style of the hat, I am hoping that you will agree to send me another one for free. This time, however, I would like you to box it properly to avoid the same problem from happening again. Otherwise, I would like a full refund and I will be contacting PayPal if I do not hear back from you in regards to this.

Thank you for giving the matter your attention and I hope to hear your reply soon.

Yours sincerely, John Doe



# General IELTS Task 1 Letter Writing – Useful Words & Expressions

To complete your IELTS letter writing task within 20 minutes, it is helpful to know some common phrases and set expressions. Being able to use these will allow you to express your ideas quickly and effectively, without thinking about each and every word. While you're learning their meaning, also make sure you can spell them perfectly.

## **Apologizing**

I'm sorry about...

I am sorry that...

I'm very sorry about...

I'm very sorry for...

Please forgive me for...

I'd like to apologize for...

Please accept my apologies.

Please accept my sincere apologies. (very formal)

## **Asking for Help**

I'd be grateful if you could...

I would be grateful if you could...

I would appreciate it if you could...

Could you please...

I was wondering if you could help me. (informal)

I would like to know...

## **Asking for Information**

I am writing to enquire about...

I am writing to find out about...

What I am looking for is...

I would like to know about/if...

## **Closing**

I look forward to seeing you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

I look forward to meeting you.

## **Complaining / expressing dissatisfaction**

I'm writing to express my dissatisfaction with...

I'm writing to express my annoyance with...

I am not happy about...

...was very disappointing.

**Conveying regards**

Please give my best regards to your family.

Please pass on my best wishes to your wife and children.

Please give my regards to your parents.

**Expressing satisfaction**

I was delighted to hear that...

I was very happy to learn that...

I was thrilled to find out that...

I was glad to hear that...

...was very enjoyable.

**Expressing concern / sympathy**

I was sorry to hear about... (your accident/ illness)

I am writing to express my concern about...

**Giving bad news**

I regret to inform you that...(semi-formal)

I am sorry to tell you that...(informal)

I regret to advise you that...(formal)

I am afraid I have some bad news.(informal)

**Giving good news**

I am pleased to inform you that...(semi-formal)

I am delighted to tell you that...(informal)

I am happy to advise you that...(formal)

I thought you might like to know that...

**Giving reasons**

This is because...

This is because of...

This is due to... (formal)

This is as a result of...(formal)

This is owing to...(formal)

**Making suggestions**

Would it be a good idea to...

Perhaps it would be a good idea to...

**Thanking**

Thanks.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Thank you kindly.

I can't thank you enough.

No words can express my gratitude.

I am extremely grateful for...

I very much appreciate your \_\_\_\_\_ing

## Informal letter endings:

1. Thanks for your help. (A letter to a friend in response to his support)
2. Please write soon. (suitable for all letter types)
3. I hope I didn't cause you too much trouble. (for a letter asking for some help or favour)
4. If I can tell you anything else, please call me. (Information giving letter to a friend)
5. Hope this advice will be of some help to you.
6. I'm looking forward to seeing you both on this Saturday. (semi-formal or informal letter)
7. It would be lovely to see you again, please do your best to make it. (a letter of invitation to a friend)
8. I look forward to receiving the information requested.

## Formal letter endings:

Usually formal letters end with longer sentences and they are exact point to point. You cannot use contractions as we do with informal letters.

1. I look forward to your prompt response.
2. Please, do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further information.
3. Thank you very much for your cooperation and I hope to hear from you shortly.
4. I await your prompt response in anticipation.
5. I would be very grateful if you attend to this matter as soon as possible.
6. I trust that this situation will be rectified without further delay.

7. I feel confident that you will find something in our range that meets your requirements and look forward to receiving your order.

8. We would be extremely grateful if you allow us to..... Thank you very much in anticipation to your cooperation.

You can see that some of the sentences use certain words again. Similarly, you can create your own sentences but as usual you should go through this post again and again initially when you start preparing for the test.

That way you will naturally remember these sentences and use them automatically in your letters.