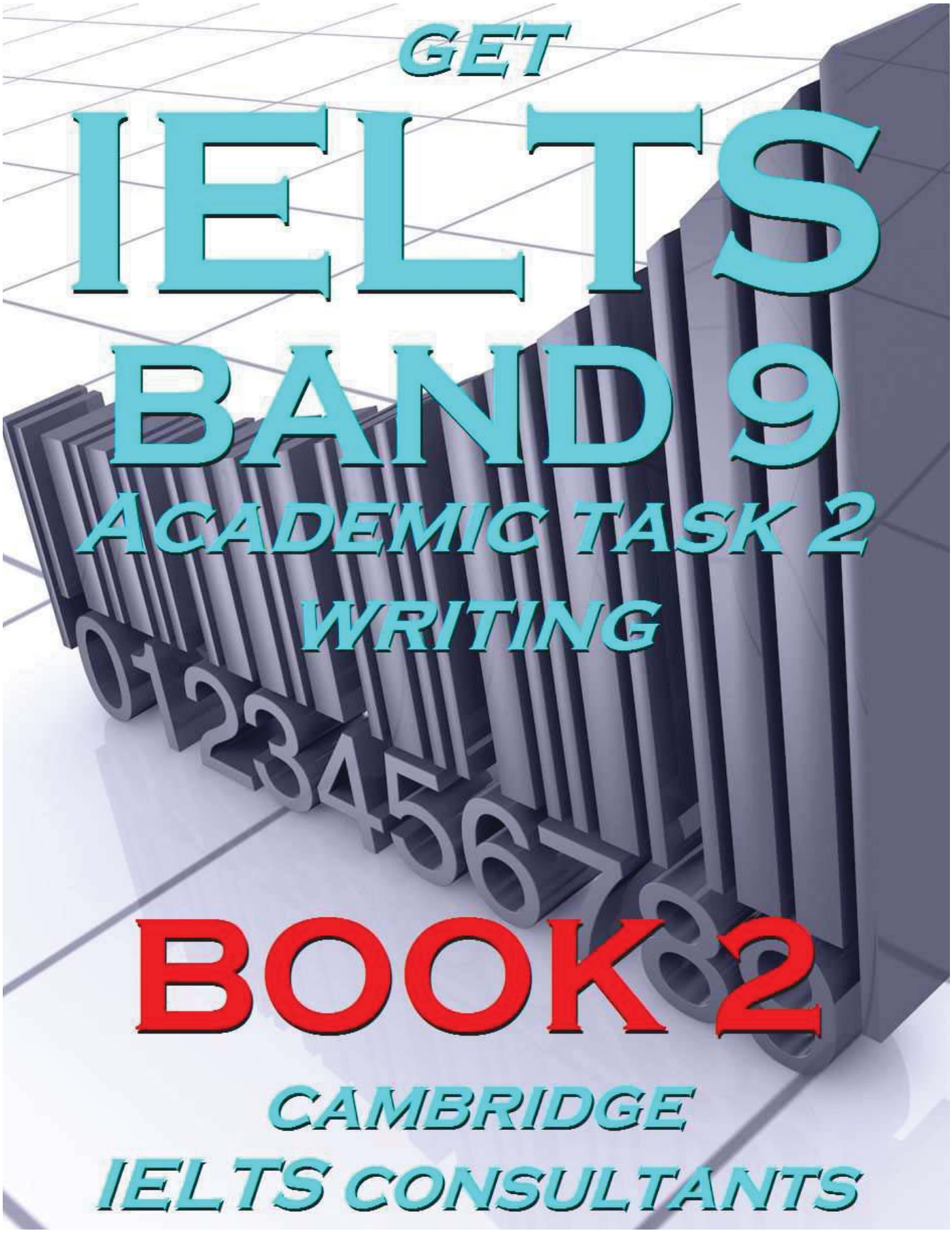

GET
IELTS
BAND 9
ACADEMIC TASK 2
WRITING
BOOK 2
CAMBRIDGE
IELTS CONSULTANTS

GET IELTS BAND 9
In Academic Writing

Book 2
Essay Planning

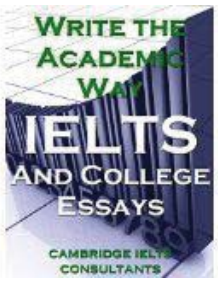
Fifteen **NEW** Essays
Showing How to Maximise
Your IELTS Task 2 Writing
By Creating Powerful Essay Plans

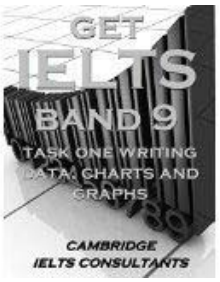
Published by Cambridge IELTS Consultants
Cambridge, United Kingdom

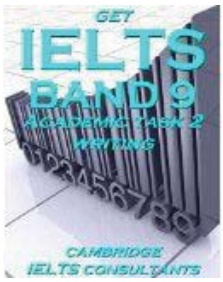
Copyright © Cambridge IELTS Consultants
Jessica Alperne, Peter Swires 2015

All rights are reserved, including resale rights.
This e-book is sold subject to the condition that it will not be copied, duplicated, stored or distributed for any purpose or in any form.
No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from the authors.

Also on Kindle from the same publisher:







Packed with advice, examples, models to follow and real Band 9 essays to help you get the best possible result.

Contents

Introduction from the authors

Frequently Asked Questions about IELTS essay planning

Example Tasks, essay plans, Band 9 model essays and examiner's notes

Example Task 1

Example Task 2

Example Task 3

Example Task 4

Example Task 5

Example Task 6

Example Task 7

Example Task 8

Example Task 9

Example Task 10

Example Task 11

Example Task 12

Example Task 13

Example Task 14

Example Task 15

Overview: The IELTS Academic Task 2 essay types

The most common mistakes in IELTS academic writing

More from Cambridge IELTS Consultants

Introduction from the authors

One of the most frequent criticisms which IELTS examiners make about Academic Task 2 essays is, 'This essay doesn't seem to have a plan!'

This book will help you to avoid that problem.

The fact is that IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 can be challenging even for native speakers of English, and everyone will benefit from making a plan before starting to write. In this book, we show you fifteen new essays, all written to Band 9 standard, together with the essay plan which the candidate created first. There are also examiner's notes which show you how the examiner will judge your essay in terms of its structure, content, style and language.

Remember, your essay plan is purely for you to use; at the end of the test, any plans or notes that you make are collected and shredded by the examiners. But the plan will help you write the best essay possible, and the examiner will always notice that you have planned carefully.

If you have read our other books on Task 2, you will know about the different types of Task and how to structure your essay for each one. If you're not familiar with these types, please read our 'Overview' section from the table of contents, because it is absolutely vital to understand this concept before taking the exam.

If you need a dictionary while reading this book, we recommend the free Cambridge Dictionaries Online from Cambridge University Press.

Don't just trust to luck in your IELTS exam – it's too important.
The key is expert advice!

Jessica Alperne & Peter Swires
Cambridge IELTS Consultants
cambridgeielts@outlook.com

Frequently Asked Questions about IELTS essay planning

Why do I need to make a plan before writing in Task 2?

It's essential in Task 2 to show the examiner that you have analysed the Task, understood the type of essay needed, and that your ideas are clear and logical. Making an essay plan will help you to do this, and also to organise your ideas, examples and evidence for the main body.

How long should I spend making this plan?

Five minutes maximum is the best use of time. Remember the ideal time management in Task 2:

5 minutes (maximum) planning
30 minutes writing
5 minutes (minimum) checking for any mistakes

How do I make the plan?

You will have spare paper on your exam desk. Using your pen, circle the key words on the Task and make a note of the type of task this is, remembering our overview of the different types.
Ask yourself: is this an Ideas or an Opinion type task? Which type of Ideas or Opinion task is it? Do I understand the topic and the instruction itself?
When this is clear, make some short notes under the following headings:

Task Type
Intro
Main Body
(+ Concession if this is an Opinion>Personal viewpoint Task ONLY)
Conclusion (for Opinion tasks) or **Summary** (for Ideas tasks)

Under '**Intro**' note any background information you can use in the introduction; make a note to show the examiner that you understand the task type. For an Opinion>Personal viewpoint task ONLY, this means giving your opinion in the introduction.

Under '**Main Body**' note two or three ideas for each aspect of the argument, with any examples or evidence you can think of. For example, in an Opinion>Discussion task, note two or three ideas on each side of the discussion; in an Ideas>problems/solutions Task, note two or three problems, then two or three solutions. You don't need to use more than three ideas for each aspect, but you must have at least two!
Make a very short note of any examples or other evidence you can use to explain the ideas. Remember that your evidence should be taken from things you know or have read about in society generally, not stories about your life or people you know.

Under '**Conclusion**,' note your opinion (in Opinion Tasks) or quickly sum up your main body ideas (in Ideas Tasks.) It is essential to decide your opinion for an 'Opinion' essay before you start writing! If you don't, your essay will probably seem illogical.

Of course, this essay plan will **not** be seen by anyone except you, so it doesn't need to be written neatly or in complete sentences. An example is:

Task

Some commentators feel that grandparents should live together with their children and grandchildren, while others say that older people should be encouraged to live independently.
Consider the possible arguments on both sides of this debate, and reach your own conclusion.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Discussion

Intro: traditional vs affordable debate

For living with family:

1 Traditional: More emotional support, eg in bereavement
2 More security (against crime and accidents)
3 Cheaper, may increase quality of life

For living independently:

1 Increases self-reliance and independence, self-esteem
2 Family may not have space or time
3 Allows grandparents to have families visiting them, enjoyment

Conclusion: Better to live alone, provided that health/finances allow this

This is a classic Task 2 plan, helping the candidate to think of ideas and organise evidence and examples. The complete essay is shown in our 'Example Task 1' in this book. You will see that the plan is written in simple English, in incomplete sentences, for maximum speed.

How do I use the plan while I'm writing?

You should look quickly at the plan before you start each paragraph, to remind you of the points for each section. It would be almost impossible to remember all your ideas and examples unless you check the plan. As you write the essay, you will need to change the simple words in your plan for more advanced words (eg cheaper>less costly or better>stronger argument.)
To ensure that you are on track, remember to count the number of words you have written after you finish each paragraph, and also check the time frequently.

In this book, we have noted the number of words after each essay so that you can see the word count, but in the real exam you don't need to do this. Please also remember that in Academic Task 2, you should never use contractions (eg don't, won't etc) or exclamation (!) marks. Our book 'Write The Academic Way' gives lots of advice on writing in an Academic English style.

Should I also do a plan for Task 1?

We recommend not doing a plan for task 1, because there is so little time. As we explain in our book 'Get IELTS Band 9 In Writing Task 1,' it is better to draw graphic notes with a red pen on the test paper itself, especially if it is a data task with charts, graphs and tables. Remember, you must finish Task 1 in 20 minutes maximum.

Example Task 1

Some commentators feel that grandparents should live together with their children and grandchildren, while others say that elderly people should be encouraged to live independently.

Consider the possible arguments on both sides of this debate, and reach your own conclusion.

Explanation of the Task

This is an Opinion>Discussion type Task, requiring you to discuss both sides of a topic and then give your view. You should introduce the topic, make it clear that this will be a Discussion essay, and then give two or three ideas to support each side in the debate. You should give your own opinion in the conclusion.

Remember that the instruction 'Consider the possible arguments on both sides of this debate, and reach your own conclusion' may be expressed in many different ways in the IELTS test, but the principle for this Task type will be the same.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Discussion

Intro: traditional vs affordable debate

For living with family:

1 Traditional: More emotional support, eg in bereavement
2 More security (against crime and accidents)
3 Cheaper, may increase quality of life

For living independently:

1 Increases self-reliance and independence, self-esteem
2 Family may not have space or time
3 Allows grandparents to have families visiting them, enjoyment

Conclusion: Better to live alone, provided that health/finances allow this

Band 9 Model Essay

The issue of whether grandparents should live with their extended families is partly a question of the traditions in different cultures or nationalities. However, the question of affordability also plays an increasing part, and so this debate is rather complex, as we shall see.

On the one hand, those who support the idea of grandparents living with their children point to

the higher level of emotional support which all family members may receive in such situations, for example in times of crisis such as bereavement. Furthermore, it is also true that personal security may be increased, offering protection against such problems as accidents or even robbery. Finally, it seems that extended family life will also be considerably less costly, for instance with lower food and utility bills, meaning that enjoyment of life may be higher.

By contrast, supporters of grandparents living independently often state that elderly people should be encouraged to be as self-reliant as possible, as this boosts their self-esteem and may guard against mental decline in old age. They also say, with some merit, that many younger families these days do not have the housing space, or indeed the spare time, which is necessary to care properly for older members. As a last point, it is also true that many grandparents prefer to see their grandchildren on a less frequent basis (as opposed to every day), making these visits more special and cherished for all concerned.

Overall, it appears to me that the stronger argument is in favour of grandparents living independently, with all the advantages of self-reliance and separate space. This is provided that their health and finances allow them to continue living separately, without risk or the fear of isolation.

(282 words)

Examiner's notes

This is a clearly structured and logical Opinion>Discussion essay, which would certainly achieve Band 9. The candidate clarifies at the start that the essay will 'debate' the discussion, and the main body emphasises the two opposing views with helpful linking phrases ('On the one hand . . . By contrast . . .') The main body has three clear ideas on each side, and the writer uses a variety of phrases to report the two aspects ('Supporters point to . . . state . . . say, with some merit . . .') The use of conjunctions to show the transition from one idea to the next inside each paragraph is excellent ('Furthermore . . . Finally . . . They also say . . . As a last point . . .')

The candidate avoids emotion or excessive personalisation by using 'It seems . . . It appears that . . .' which is a strong feature of academic writing. The conclusion is clearly introduced ('Overall . . .') and recaps briefly on the debate, adding a 'proviso' with 'This is provided that . . .' which makes the opinion balanced and more complex.

The language used is formal/academic but also modern (I noted in particular 'bereavement, utility, boost, merit, self-reliance.')

I have the impression of a well-organised candidate, who can use the key elements of academic writing to discuss an issue logically and very clearly.

Example Task 2

'For all children, the ability to play a musical instrument is just as important as the ability to read and write.'

How far do you agree with this suggestion? How important is it for a child to learn to play a musical instrument, in your view?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Opinion>Personal Viewpoint type task. It does not ask you to debate both sides of a topic, but to say how much you agree with an idea. You should introduce the topic and give your opinion in the introduction. The main body should explain your reasons for your view, with two or three supporting ideas. You should mention the opposing view briefly, and then reject it (this is called the 'concession.') The conclusion should state your opinion again, and summarise some of the main supporting ideas.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Personal Viewpoint

Intro: I don't agree for all children

Main Body:

1 Not all children are musically talented
2 Literacy is a guarantee of education and progress; music is not (eg few professional musicians)
3 Music should be one of a range of optional activities (eg with sport, hobbies, reading)

Concession: For some (a few) children music is essential, but not all

Conclusion: Literacy more important than playing music. Music a secondary, optional activity, can be invaluable for some.

Band 9 Model Essay

The question of which skills to prioritise for a child's early education is important for all parents and educators, and music can certainly claim to be a key possibility when deciding which abilities to teach. However, I feel that playing music is actually less important than basic literacy, and I will explain the reasons here.

Firstly, it seems simplistic to say that music is paramount 'for all children.' Certainly, there are some children who are highly talented or have great interest in music, and when we think of childhood prodigies such as Beethoven or Yehudi Menuhin we see how this talent can be brought out. However, such talents are rare, and even the enjoyment and cultural values to be gained from learning music cannot genuinely be compared to the benefits of becoming literate. Secondly, it is a fact that literacy is a guarantee of academic progress and the absorption of information, while playing music does not offer this security. For example, it would be unimaginable to transmit scientific or mathematical information to children via the medium of music. Finally, it is surely wiser to regard music as one of a wide range of secondary skills, ranking below literacy and sitting alongside sports, hobbies, foreign languages and other important but less essential activities.

Of course, those who say that highly talented children must be allowed to develop their talents are quite correct; it is equally true, though, that few children seem to possess musical ability to the extent that it should be prioritised so highly for all pupils.

In conclusion, I would not wish to underestimate the potential benefits of learning to play music for a minority of children, and it should certainly be available as an option. However, if we think of all children in a given community, literacy appears to be a far stronger pathway to progress and independence.

(309 words)

Examiner's notes

This candidate has produced a Band 9 essay with a clear structure, logical ideas and a strong command of Academic English. The introduction introduces some general background about the topic, and makes it clear that the essay will be the appropriate Opinion>Personal viewpoint type.

The main body is largely given to an explanation of the candidate's reasons for thinking this, which are sequenced well with 'Firstly/secondly/finally.' In this section, the writer avoids using 'I' and uses impersonal structures instead ('it seems . . . when we think of . . . it is a fact that . . . it is surely') which we would expect in Academic writing in English. There is a short 'concession' paragraph that mentions the opposing view and then counters it with a logical objection.

The language throughout is academic in style but is never too formal or complicated. For instance, the part which reads . . .

'Secondly, it is a fact that literacy is a guarantee of academic progress and the absorption of information, while playing music does not offer this security. For example, it would be unimaginable to transmit scientific or mathematical information to children via the medium of music.'

. . . is an excellent demonstration of complex sentences (ie sentences with several ideas) written in a clear way which is similar to academic writing or advanced journalism which one might read in the media.

The two musical geniuses given as examples are sufficiently well-known to be relevant (this is something which can cause problems when candidates reference people whom they know about but who are not widely known to the public.)

The conclusion is effective in summarising the main ideas and recapping on the writer's opinion.

As an examiner, I start reading an IELTS essay by wanting to give the highest possible mark, and nothing here would stop me from giving a Band 9!

Example Task 3

In many countries, truancy * is a worrying problem for both parents and educators. What are the causes of truancy, and what may be the effects on the child and the wider community?

(* truancy = the situation when a child pretends to go to school but in fact goes somewhere else, for example to play unsupervised. The verb is 'to play truant from school.')

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas>Causes/Effects type Task. It does not ask you to say if truancy is a good or bad thing, but it asks you to think of ideas about why truancy happens and the impact on children and the community. You should introduce the topic briefly, then suggest two or three causes, plus two or three effects, and then summarise in the conclusion, without expressing a personal judgement.

Sometimes, a Task will give you a definition of a word or phrase; make sure you read this carefully and use the words accurately in the essay, because the meaning might be different from what you initially think.

Student's Plan

Type: ideas>causes/effects (effects on child & community)

Intro: this is cause/effect essay

Possible causes:
1 Boredom with school, dull lessons
2 Peer pressure, other children do it

Possible effects:
1 Lack of progress, & career problems (child)
2 Tempted into crime (child)
3 Petty crime eg vandalism, litter, anti-social behaviour (community)

Summary: Causes can be academic & from peers; effects are to do with crime & behaviour

Band 9 Model Essay

Truancy is an activity which some children regard as amusing or even exciting, but which can have serious impacts on their future and on society as a whole. I can identify two main causes, and three broad effects, which we will describe now.

Perhaps the main cause is a sense of boredom or frustration with school itself, for instance with the content, pace or organisation of the lessons. This can be seen in the way that pupils often

avoid certain lessons but not others, suggesting that specific subjects or teachers are the personal grievance. Another factor may frequently be peer pressure, meaning that pupils feel obliged to play truant because some of their peers or friends are doing this. We can see that the child's desire to be popular among a peer group may be higher than the motivation to study and progress.

Turning to possible effects, the tendency to underperform academically is probably the most serious impact on a pupil's life, leading to poor exam results and weak career progression in later life. Another effect may be the temptation to participate in petty crime or antisocial behaviour while the child is unsupervised, potentially opening a pathway into more serious crimes later on. For example, a child who commits vandalism may progress to theft and robbery, a trend we see in some major South American cities such as Rio or Buenos Aires. This issue of crime is probably the third major effect, and one that impacts on the community as a whole. For instance, children playing truant may cause damage, drop litter, intimidate elderly people and commit other acts which spread a sense of instability and anxiety, even though the financial impact is low.

To sum up, the causes of truancy generally relate to lack of challenge or peer pressures, while the effects are seen in individual under-achievement and in minor crime against the community as a whole.

(315 words)

Examiner's notes

This candidate has produced a logical and clear to read essay which answers the Cause>Effect Task to a Band 9 standard. The introduction tells me that she has identified the essay type, and advises me to expect to read about two causes and three effects.

The main body uses tentative language effectively ('Perhaps the main cause . . . Another factor may frequently be . . . may be higher than . . .' etc) which adds a sense of objectivity. The second paragraph is introduced clearly ('Turning to . . .') and the ideas are separated helpfully ('Another effect . . . the third major effect . . .') showing that the 'three effects' described in the introduction are being explained. The examples given are rather simple, but they certainly illustrate the main ideas in a concise way.

The vocabulary shows a good command of advanced material (eg 'sense of boredom' 'tendency to underperform' 'participate in' 'commit acts') and the impression is that the candidate has read a lot of general commentary in the press or media to help develop this.

The conclusion summarises the main ideas, and expresses them without repeating directly from the main body (eg 'boredom>lack of challenge' 'underperform>under-achievement' 'petty crime>minor crime') which shows a wide range of active vocabulary.

Example Task 4

Many people today are worried about the large quantities of waste produced by ordinary households. What problems are caused by household waste, and what solutions may be possible in both the short and the long term?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas>Problems/solutions type Task. It is not asking for your opinion, but for you to propose some ideas on this topic. You should introduce the topic and essay, and describe two or three problems, then two or three solutions, and then summarise. Note that the task asks for 'both the short and the long term' solutions, so you must mention both of these. Also, the topic is only about household (= domestic) waste, not industrial waste; remember to check these smaller points in the instructions, because in the exam it can be easy to miss them!

Student's Plan

Type: Ideas>problems/solutions

Intro: Background: an increasing problem (domestic waste)

Problems
1 Processing & disposal, eg landfill, recycling
2 Cost of recycling/safe disposal is high (taxes etc)

Solutions
1 Short-term: More funds for recycling, increase use of recycled material
2 Long-term: More education/incentives/penalties to change behaviour

Summary:
Problems = environmental & cost; solutions = short & long term

Band 9 Model Essay

It is inevitable that modern households will produce some waste, but the increasing volumes of refuse over recent years present a challenge for us all. There seem to be two main problems stemming from this situation, and also two steps we could take to address it fully.

Possible the major problem is the huge question of how to collect, process and dispose of this material. Household waste comprises elements ranging from foodstuffs to metal, paper and plastics, and local authorities sometimes struggle to handle such a diverse mix of material. The historical solution has been incineration or landfill, but the problems of pollution and long-term ground

contamination which arise have led to widespread efforts to recycle at least some of the waste. This leads us to the second concern, which is the high cost of disposing of refuse in an ecologically sound manner. We would all wish as much as possible of our rubbish to be recycled (for example by paper pulping or reusing plastics) but the expense involved must be met by higher taxes and charges for households.

Regarding possible solutions, probably the most immediate short-term solution would be to divert far more government funds into waste processing and recycling facilities at a local level. This would reduce the environmental impact of the waste by reducing pollution, and also lower our demand for raw materials, as more recycled products would consequently be produced. A further, longer-term solution might be to raise the level of public understanding for the need to consume less material in households, especially in terms of packaging and wasted food. A campaign of education along these lines would gradually lessen the volume of waste, especially if reinforced by incentives for consuming less and penalties for excessive waste, as we see being trialled in the UK at present.

Overall, the main problems are both environmental and financial. The possible solutions involve more immediate investment in facilities, and also encouraging long-term changes in household behaviour.

(326 words)

Examiner's notes

This is a logical and well-organised Band 9 essay, with strong academic style and very effective advanced vocabulary. The introduction tells me clearly that the candidate has considered both the topic and the task, and has prepared a problem/solution main body.

The 'problems' paragraph gives examples in an effective way ('ranging from . . . to') and uses complex sentences which present a variety of ideas (in particular the sentence 'The historical solution . . . some of the waste' which contains three stages of ideas in a logical sequence.) Signposting is excellent (eg 'This leads us to . . . Regarding possible . . .')

The 'solutions' paragraph offers practical ideas without excessive technical detail, and uses tentative language ('would . . . might be') to show that the candidate is discussing possible remedies rather than presenting a complete solution. The candidate emphasises that she is presenting short and long term solutions. The level of vocabulary is excellent, both in terms of academic English (eg 'stemming from . . . comprises . . . divert funds . . . reinforced by incentives') and topic-specific language (eg 'incineration . . . ecologically sound . . . paper pulping . . . environmental impact.') We don't expect candidates to know scientific or very specialised words, but this vocabulary is used widely on this topic in the general media.

The summary is rather brief, but it covers the main ideas well, and at 326 words I would not want the essay to be much longer.

Example Task 5

'People who do not use social media networks will always fall behind in career development opportunities.'

To what extent do you feel that this is an accurate and important prediction?

(Social media networks = messaging and information exchange systems such as Facebook and Twitter.)

Explanation of the Task

This is an Opinion>personal viewpoint type task (like Example Task number 2 in this book.) Remember that this type is different from the Opinion>Discussion type; here, give you opinion in the introduction, and use the main body to explain your reasons. Have a short 'concession' paragraph, and then summarise your opinion and reasons very briefly in the conclusion.

Remember not to use excessive detail in your evidence and examples! You probably have a lot of information about a topic such as social media, but your evidence needs to be accessible to a general reader.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Personal viewpoint

Introduction: Background; I don't agree with 'always' in the statement

Main body reasons;
1 Qualifications etc are more important (eg doctors)
2 Interpersonal skills are more powerful, (eg negotiation)
3 Social media has risks (eg pics/comments), some people minimise SM because of this

Concession: True that social media is good for networking; but this is after success, not before

Conclusion: Recap on qualifications/personal skills, and the concession

Band 9 Model Essay

Social media plays an increasingly pivotal role in our lives, and an ability to use these systems is certainly an advantage both socially and professionally. However, it seems rather excessive to say that ignorance of these matters will 'always' restrict people's careers, and I will explain why.

Firstly, career progression relies on a whole range of factors, not only on the use of social

media. For example, a professional person will have a range of qualifications, ranging from academic exams to vocational certificates and membership of professional bodies. We see this in the way that successful doctors take increasingly specialised qualifications and join specific institutes to develop their skills. Here, social media may be a communication tool, but is surely not the driving force behind success. Secondly, career development relies greatly on interpersonal skills such as presentation methods, persuasiveness and negotiation, all of which are used in face-to-face situations rather than remotely. Finally, we should remember the dangers of social media and the risk of actually hindering one's career, for instance by accidentally distributing awkward photos or comments which can be an embarrassment personally and professionally. Indeed, many professionals in fact minimise their use of these media because of this risk.

Admittedly, it is true that social media presents great opportunities for making contacts and networking, for example by building a following or exchanging updates on a particular topic. However, this tends to happen when a person is already qualified and respected in their field, rather than being a cause of success.

In conclusion, it appears that skilful use of these media can play a useful role in career progression, despite the possible risks. Nevertheless, the fundamental qualifications and personal skills which drive a career will ensure that those who are not enthusiastic users will still progress as they wish.

(302 words)

Examiner's notes

This is an impressive Band 9 essay: clear for me to read, with suitable ideas and evidence.

The intro helps me to anticipate what will be in the main body ('I will explain why') and, by focussing on the key word 'always,' it shows that the candidate has analysed the task carefully. This is a strong start.

The main body has strong linking between ideas ('Firstly . . . Secondly . . . Finally') and the evidence is presented with a range of structures ('For example . . . such as . . . for instance . . . ranging from/to . . . we see this in the way . . .') which add variety. The concession is clearly introduced ('Admittedly') and the opposing view is rejected in a logical way. The conclusion is balanced ('Nevertheless') and is an effective recap of the main ideas.

The academic style is very effective, with a number of complex sentences (sentences with two or more ideas) especially in main body and conclusion. Some of the vocab is quite simple (eg 'face-to-face') but this fits the argument well; elsewhere, the vocabulary shows a very advanced grasp, especially words such as 'pivotal, vocational, to hinder, fundamental.'

One point I would like to emphasise is the nature of the ideas in this essay. The candidate's reasons for his opinion are based on quite simple reasons, which he explains with clear examples. As an examiner, I like to see such simple, clearly-explained reasons which allow the candidate to demonstrate his skills of organisation and Academic English style.

Example Task 6

'Knowing how to make a group presentation is the most important skill for anyone in the world of work today.'

How important are presentation and public speaking skills, compared to various other work skills? Which skill is the most important ability for most people these days?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas>Evaluate type essay, which is the least common type in the IELTS writing test. The Task is not asking for your opinion about presentation skills in isolation, but is asking you to compare the importance of this skill to various other skills, and to decide which is the most important.

You should introduce the topic and give an outline of your decision in the introduction, then use the main body to show your 'ranking' of what is important. You can simply do this by saying 'The most important is . . . the second most important is . . .' and so on. Three ideas are enough for the main body (ie a 'ranking' of three skills, in this example) with your reasons/evidence for deciding on this ranking.

The summary should briefly recap on the ranking and your reasons.

Student's Plan

Essay Type: Ideas>Evaluate

Introduction: A range of skills needed; 2 others more important than presentational

Main Body:

1 (Most important) Time management/prioritising, eg for medicine, conferences less important

2 (2nd important) Team management, public & private sector, social media replaces public speaking

3 Presentation skills are 3rd most important today, work is changing

Conclusion: Don't neglect speaking skills, but this is number 3 in workplace now

Band 9 Model Essay

Success at work these days requires a wide range of skills, of which presentational ability is certainly among the most important. However, there are two other skills which appear to be more useful, which we will evaluate now.

Possibly the key skill in professional life today is in fact the ability to handle a high workload, including the methods of prioritising tasks and managing one's time in an effective way. In most professions, this skill has grown in importance hugely over recent years, while the need for public speaking has probably remained static. For example, in the medical field, doctors attend increasingly fewer conferences and seminars, because these events are perceived as time-consuming and less productive than they used to be due to the ease of exchanging information remotely.

The second most important skill is probably the capacity to manage teams of people, including the techniques of setting and monitoring team objectives. This ability is fundamental to modern organisations in both business and the public sector, and success in this area virtually guarantees a person professional advancement, even if their public speaking skills are less developed. We see this in the way in which finance or consumer goods companies promote effective team managers, but rarely require them to address large groups of people. The same trend can be seen in the civil administration and public services, where public speaking has to some extent been replaced by use of social media.

For these reasons, I would evaluate presentation skills as a tertiary skill, which is important but increasingly less useful than in the past, due to the radical changes in the way we work together and communicate with each other professionally.

Overall, it is true that professional people should not neglect or underestimate the usefulness of speaking skills. However, the skills of workload management and team direction appear to be more relevant and decisive in today's rapidly evolving workplace.

Examiner's notes

'Evaluate' type essays can be difficult to write effectively, because the candidate sometimes tries to write about how 'good or bad' something is, rather than 'where in the ranking' it is. This essay clarifies in its introduction that the writer is going to evaluate and present a ranking of importance, leading us neatly into the main body.

The reasons given for placing the 'time management' and 'team management' skills above 'presentation' skills are explained with relevant examples which are persuasive without requiring specialised knowledge. Each of these skills is compared to 'presentation' skills, and logical reasons are given with evidence for deciding that they are more important. The candidate uses a very effective mix of tentative language (eg 'Possibly the key skill . . . probably remained static . . . The second most important skill is probably . . .') and also persuasive descriptions (eg 'events are perceived' 'fundamental' 'virtually guarantees' 'We see this in the way . . .') This combination of tentative, impersonal phrases and more persuasive phrases is something I reward with a high band score.

The language shows a strong level of advanced, Academic English, although it is noticeable that all the language is today widely used in the press and media. For instance, 'static' 'perceived as' 'fundamental' 'monitor objectives' 'tertiary' 'radical changes' 'rapidly evolving.' These are all common words when topics are discussed in a professional way.

Example Task 7

Some people feel that the exploration of space justifies a large amount of government and private investment. Other people think that this field is of increasingly low relevance, and should not be a priority.

Debate both sides of this discussion, and explain your own view. How important is it for us to explore space at the moment?

Explanation of the Task

This is another Opinion>Discussion type Task. The introduction should make it clear that you understand the Task type, by saying 'There are arguments on both sides . . . as we will see' or similar. Explain two or three ideas on each side of the debate, and give your opinion in the conclusion.

Remember to decide your opinion when you are making your plan. The second main body paragraph should connect with the opinion in the conclusion, as you see in this model essay.

Student's Plan

Essay Type: Opinion>Discussion

Intro: Background; discussion essay intro

For exploration:
1 Technical progress (eg plastics)
2 Helps solve issues, eg biology (eg ISS genetics research)

Against exploration
1 High cost; doesn't benefit everyone; most advances are not due to space
2 Academic pursuit; funding today doesn't allow it; we can solve problems without it (eg wildlife etc)

Conclusion: I'm against space research; too costly now; space will always be there

Band 9 Model Essay

Space exploration is a subject which provokes great emotions as well as scientific interest, and at times the two become somewhat blurred. There are strong arguments on both sides of the debate about whether to continue space travel, which we will discuss here.

On the one hand, those who urge the continued exploration of space say that this field has given us substantial technical advances over the past fifty years, ranging from better plastics and

alloys to a greater understanding of flight and gravity. Furthermore, they claim that further investigations will help to solve some of mankind's most pressing issues, such as lack of food and environmental damage, because the study of (for example) biology and chemistry can be carried out more radically in space. Recent experiments on the International Space Station in the field of genetics certainly seem to support this view.

Conversely, however, people who oppose more funding for space research point to the extremely high costs involved, compared to the practical benefits which are gained for almost all members of the human race. For example, these opponents state that all the major developments in terms of medicine, genetics, materials and mechanics have actually been as a result of terrestrial science and experiments, rather than stemming from space exploration. Moreover, they feel that space investigation is largely an academic pursuit, fascinating though it is, and that at a time of austerity our funding should be directed to more practical programmes to help people. It is indeed true that addressing some major human challenges such as pollution control, protection of wildlife and greater political stability would not require any involvement at all by space scientists.

Overall, I feel that the opponents of high funding for space have the stronger argument at present. It seems that the enormous sums involved could be used more practically to deal with some of our most immediate problems. After all, space will always be there to explore, when funding and other problems make its research more affordable for us as a species.

(338 words)

Examiner's notes

This candidate has achieved Band 9 by reporting the ideas on both sides of the discussion in an objective, academic way, with strong use of examples. The intro has an interesting background comment, and confirms that this is a 'Discussion' type essay.

In the main body, the candidate uses 'reporting' language very effectively (eg 'those who urge . . . they claim . . .those who oppose . . . these opponents . . .') and also adds some approval of the evidence used in the argument by saying, 'Recent experiments . . . certainly seem to support this view . . . It is indeed true that . . .' This combination of impersonal style and validating the evidence makes the essay seem authoritative.

The language has some strong examples of academic collocations (= words which are traditionally used together):

'Somewhat blurred . . . practical benefits . . . greater understanding . . . academic pursuit . . . the enormous sums involved.'

The conclusion is quite long, but it is balanced and provides a logical support for the writer's opinion. I am glad that the essay stopped at that point, because 338 words is close to the maximum that I would wish to read. The best essays that I see tend to be around 300 to 320 words.

Example Task 8

Some employers are willing to give their workers a certain amount of unpaid sabbatical* time, believing this benefits the individual and the organisation. Other employers see no merit in this arrangement and discourage it.

Consider the possible arguments for and against unpaid sabbatical leave, and reach a viewpoint of your own.

(* unpaid sabbatical time or leave = extended, unpaid time off work, in which an employee can follow personal interests or studies, and then return to work)

Explanation of the Task

This is another Opinion>Discussion task, the most common type in the writing test.

Note the keywords 'unpaid leave' and 'employers,' which are inviting you to consider the cost aspect to a business in your answer, and also 'the individual and the organisation' which is telling you to think about both these perspectives.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Discussion

Intro: Background; fashionable idea; discussion intro

For unpaid leave:
1 Motivating; workers are refreshed
2 Low cost; can help with restructures etc

Against it
1 Disruption; people need to be replaced
2 Workers lose interest/go to competitors
3 More suited to academic work, research etc

Conclusion: Problems outweigh advantages; ok for individuals, but difficult for company and colleagues

Band 9 Model Essay

The idea of offering employees sabbatical time has become quite fashionable recently, with some major companies believing it has great benefits. However, there is also substantial opposition to the concept, and we will discuss the two views now.

Those employers who support unpaid sabbaticals often highlight the motivating effect which such leave can have on an employee. They feel that, at a time when people are under pressure, a certain amount of extended leave can allow someone to return to work feeling refreshed and more committed to the company. A second point in favour is that such leave does not cost the company anything, as the employee stops drawing a salary. Indeed, it seems that such breaks might actually save money, as departments can be downsized without the need for redundancies or compensation.

On the other hand, many other employers feel that this practice has a disruptive effect which outweighs its possible benefit to the individual. For example, if employees have a certain skill or responsibility, they must be replaced by someone who is similarly qualified, probably involving a cost in training or hiring a new worker. Companies are also reluctant to allow skilled employees to drift away from their business, fearing, with some justification, that the person might lose interest or even go to work for a competitor. Finally, some employers feel that the whole idea of sabbaticals is more suited to an academic context such as universities or research institutes, where the employee will be working on personal interests which coincide with their field of study, which is rarely the case among corporate employees.

To sum up, it seems true that the problems caused by unpaid sabbaticals do indeed outweigh the potential advantages. Although the individual employee may be refreshed, the disruption and costs caused by this absence are unreasonable for the company and for the colleagues left behind at work.

(312 words)

Examiner's notes

This is a topic where candidates sometimes struggle to find suitable ideas, but this candidate has obviously planned her ideas carefully; this is very noticeable.

The simple introduction guides the reader into the 'Discussion' main body. The ideas are explained helpfully, with strong use of examples which use some good topic-specific vocabulary ('downsize, redundancies, competitor, corporate.') Signposting is very effective, with each new idea being introduced with a conjunction, and the reporting of the views on each side is done in an impersonal way that does not commit the writer to a conclusion until the final paragraph. This is important in a task which asks us to 'consider arguments . . . and reach a viewpoint.'

The conclusion itself returns to the task instruction of 'the individual and the organisation' by weighing the two perspectives against each other. This shows me that the candidate has planned the conclusion and has been building towards it.

Example Task 9

Light pollution (excessive light during night time) is a form of pollution that distresses many people, especially in modern cities. What are the causes of light pollution, and what solutions can you suggest for governments and businesses to take?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas>Mixed>Causes/solutions type Task.

The most common 'Ideas' types are Cause/effect and Problem/solution, but sometimes the Task may mix the elements to give Causes/solutions or Problems/effects. You need to check the instructions carefully to make sure if this is the case in your test. If this happens, you need to make clear in the introduction that you have understood this, and then describe two or three ideas for each paragraph in the main body. The summary should briefly recap on the main ideas.

Remember that in 'Ideas' type tasks, you should not give a personal judgement. You should report on the situation as it exists in the wider society as a whole.

Important keywords in this Task are 'cities' and 'governments and businesses'; see in our example how the candidate has planned to address these points.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Ideas>Mixed>Causes/solutions (govts & business)

Intro: Background (topical in cities); 3 causes and 2 solutions

Causes (in cities):
1 Advertising signs eg Moscow, Tokyo
2 Street lamps/security lights (against accidents/crime)
3 Vehicle lights

Solutions:
1 Banning lights wouldn't work; better to have light insulation for homes (by governments)
2 Voluntary 'dark day' each week to reduce advertising lighting (by businesses)

Summary: Causes are advertising & public lighting; solutions are insulation & voluntary reductions

Band 9 Model Essay

As more of us live in cities, the question of light pollution is becoming increasingly topical

and important to address. There seem to be three main causes, and also two key solutions which we could take to lessen the problem.

The main cause is almost certainly the use of lighting for advertising in public spaces. For example, if we look at cities such as Tokyo or Moscow, almost all available surfaces are fitted with some form of light, often for announcements or commercial use. This huge expansion in illuminated advertising is partly a result of competitive pressures, and also due to the power of such advertising, with flashing lights, video and pictures. A secondary cause is the large number or street lamps and security lights used in cities, which are intended to reduce accidents and crime by removing shadow areas at night. Finally, high levels of night-time traffic also produce light pollution, as drivers use headlamps which shine into windows and gardens after dark.

Turning to possible remedies, it might be tempting for governments to ban or regulate electric advertising billboards, but in many cases (for example in New York or London) these signs are now a local symbol. It would also be difficult to reduce security and traffic lights, because these are needed to keep residents and travellers safe. I would rather see a government-backed programme of light protection for private homes, involving better insulation against outside light after dark. This would allow residents to rest in their homes without being disturbed by the lights in the streets outside. Additionally, a voluntary 'dark day' once per week, supported by business advertisers, in which all commercial lighting is reduced, would allow residents to experience a more natural level of darkness without jeopardizing their safety.

In summary, advertising and public lighting are the main factors behind this problem. Better light insulation, and occasional voluntary reductions in commercial lighting, would greatly help the residents to live more in peace with a brightly illuminated environment.

(332 words)

Examiner's notes

A 'Mixed' essay type requires the candidate to be flexible and pay great attention to the instructions to ensure that the Task is answered. This candidate has planned carefully, and achieves a Band 9 by organising clear ideas and explaining them effectively.

The introduction gives some background to the topic and informs me that there will be three causes and two solutions in the main body. The first cause is explained on two levels (advertising>commercial pressures) which suggests that the writer has planned the argument well. Signposting is very clear ('A secondary cause . . . Finally . . . Turning to possible remedies etc.') The 'solutions' paragraph is quite sophisticated because it rejects one possible solution in favour of another one ('I would rather see a . . .') with a logical rationale for this.

The benefits of the proposed solutions are explained ('This would allow . . .') which is something that candidates often omit to do. The summary recaps on the main ideas of the main body without repeating exactly the same language.

The English used is very natural, with some effective collocations ('competitive pressures' 'business advertisers' 'jeopardize safety') and advanced language for discussing solutions ('ban or regulate' 'government-backed programme' 'voluntary reductions.')

Example Task 10

The practice of illegally hunting wild animals continues to cause concern in many countries, particularly developing countries.

What are the causes of such hunting? What are the effects on the animals, and on the wider human society in these countries and beyond?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas>Causes/effects type Task. You should introduce the topic, describe two or three causes, then two or three effects, and then summarise briefly in the final paragraph. 'Animals' and 'wider human society' are important key words in the 'effects' part here.

Remember to avoid emotion or dramatic language, even if the topic is something you care about a lot.

Student's Plan

Essay Type: Ideas>Causes/effects (on animals & society)

Intro: Introduce topic & causes/effects

Causes:
1 Profit eg ivory, medical cures
2 Food; instability, war

Effects:
1 Extinction, disruption to food chain
2 Loss of heritage, eg Siberian tigers

Summary: Sum up the 4 main body ideas

Band 9 Model Essay

Poaching is a phenomenon with a variety of causes, both commercial and cultural. The effects can be extremely serious for animals and the community, as we will discuss now.

Possibly the most common cause of people turning to poaching is the profit which can be made from animal materials. We see this in the high prices attached to illegal ivory, furs and hides, which are highly sought after by a small but wealthy group of unscrupulous global collectors. In turn,

these prices may be the result of novelty or rarity value, or connected to imaginary medicinal properties, for example in the illegal trade for bear and gorilla body parts. A secondary cause is the more basic pressure of hunting for food, which forces some local people to kill animals purely for meat. The roots of this tend to be in localised famine or drought, or in political instability which disrupts the food supply, as we see in central Africa currently.

Turning to the effects of poaching, the most serious is the threat of extinction posed to species which are already rare or endangered because of habitat loss or other environmental factors. The resulting consequences of extinction may include damage to the food chain and the ecosphere, in addition, of course, to the loss of a precious form of life. A further effect is the further erosion of a country's natural heritage, which comprises its animals, landscape and natural resources, all of which may be under pressure already. Few could doubt, for example, that Siberia would be vastly poorer without its few remaining Siberian tigers.

Overall, the factors behind poaching tend to be commercial or connected to regional instability. The effects may include final extinction, with the damage to ecosystems and loss of heritage that this involves.

(296 words)

Examiner's notes

This Band 9 essay shows a clear argument and very strong language for describing cause and effect. The intro alerts me to the 'commercial and cultural' aspect of the causes, and these are explained in the first main body paragraph. The candidate shows that she can explain the underlying causes of a situation ('In turn, these prices may be the result of . . . 'The roots of this tend to be . . .') with relevant evidence about ivory/gorillas/central Africa.

The 'effects' paragraph is careful to answer the two elements in the task instruction (animals and society) suggesting to me that the essay is well-planned. The summary paragraph is slightly repetitive of the main body in its vocabulary, but as a recap it is very effective.

The language used displays an excellent range of vocabulary on the specific topic ('poaching, unscrupulous, famine, drought, food chain, natural heritage') and also in general language ('high prices attached to' 'The roots of this' 'The resulting consequences' 'the further erosion' 'Few could doubt, for example, that' in particular.) The IELTS examiners will always be impressed by this combination of advanced/academic phrasing and a certain amount of topic-specific vocabulary.

Example Task 11

'The use of software makes it unnecessary for people to know how to spell words correctly these days.'

Is this a statement that you agree with? To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Explanation of the Task

This is another Opinion>Personal viewpoint task. You should give your opinion in the introduction, and use the main body to justify this with two or three reasons. The 'concession' paragraph should be one or two sentences, and the conclusion should state your opinion again.

Remember that you will improve your score by giving a balanced response (ie not saying 'I totally agree/disagree' but saying 'I partly agree/disagree, because . . .')

Student's Plan

Essay Type: Opinion>Personal viewpoint

Introduction: Spellcheck is useful, but spelling can't be ignored

Main Body:
1 Still need to write manually, eg in exams & notes
2 Spelling is part of language
3 Learning spelling helps mental development (thought, sight, writing etc)

Concession: Software is useful, but a supporting tool

Conclusion: Spelling is essential, for practical & mental reasons

Band 9 Model Essay

Almost everyone uses software to create texts these days, and we all find the 'spellcheck' type features useful. However, it would be unwise for people to completely ignore learning how to spell properly by themselves, for reasons which I will explain here.

Firstly, although we mostly use typing devices, there will always be occasions when we need to write manually or without the support of software. This may be in examinations, which are still mostly handwritten, or when writing letters or notes on paper, or filling in forms. It is essential, for example, that police records or medical notes, which are often quickly completed by hand, are accurately and clearly composed. Secondly, understanding spelling is an integral part of learning a

language and the various ways that it can be used. Most educators would agree, for example, that it is impossible to divorce spelling from grammar and syntax as part of a rigorous approach to literacy.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the whole process of learning and distinguishing different sounds and spellings is a vital part of a child's mental development, involving the complex relationship between hearing, sight, thought and the writing process itself. To say that this relationship is 'unnecessary' is to neglect some of the most fundamental stages in human development which have driven our progress for the past five thousand years, since the era of hieroglyphics and primitive inscriptions.

It is true that the use of software is an invaluable tool, and may well have a role in the process of teaching children to use computers and improving their work accordingly. However, this means that is a supporting facility, not a replacement for human thought.

In conclusion, I feel that a knowledge of spelling is essential, both for practical reasons and to support the development of a person's mind as they learn to read and write, with all the mental benefits which stem from that. It seems that software is highly unlikely to replace the human mind in this very important respect.

(334 words)

Examiner's notes

This essay would achieve Band 9 due to its very well-organised argument, academic style and range of vocabulary.

In terms of the argument, the candidate gives his view in the intro and then explains his reasons, with clear signposting ('Firstly, secondly, finally.') Simple conjunctions like this are effective as long as the paragraph content is fairly advanced. The concession shows that the writer can consider opposing views and accept that they have some validity, while putting his own judgement on it ('invaluable . . . but a supporting facility.') The conclusion summarises well in new language ('practical reasons' 'mind.')

In terms of style, the writer is very persuasive in using outside opinions as evidence ('most educators would agree . . .') and in rejecting the Task statement ('To say that this relationship is 'unnecessary' is to neglect . . .') also showing that he has analysed the Task well.

The vocabulary includes some very natural and effective collocations which are typical of discussions in the quality media, such as:

an integral part of
impossible to divorce spelling from grammar
a rigorous approach
the complex relationship between . . .
since the era of . . .
all the mental benefits which stem from that.
in this very important respect.

Natural, advanced phrases like this encourage the examiner to award a very high Band score, especially if the structure is also strong.

Example Task 12

The use of phones, tablets and other devices when people are walking in public is causing concern among many commentators. What dangers may arise when people focus on such devices when walking in the street? How could these problems be reduced?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas>Problem/solution type Task. The instructions may sometimes include synonyms for 'problems' such as 'dangers, risks, drawbacks' and synonyms for 'solutions' including 'answers, remedies, ways to solve/reduce.'

Student's Plan

Essay type: Ideas>Problems/solutions
Intro: Devices are universal; 2 problems, 2 solutions

Problems:
1 Accidents, eg people, cars, traffic
2 Anti-social & rude

Solutions:
1 Education about dangers, eg in colleges, advertising
2 put warning systems on phones, like on cars

Summary: Physical & social dangers; education & warning for solutions

Band 9 Model Essay

As hand-held devices become almost universal in our society, the number of accidents related to their use is increasing accordingly, in addition to various social dangers. I will outline two such risks, and also two possible counter-measures we could take.

Firstly, the greatest danger is surely the possibility of people failing to pay attention to their surroundings when they use such items while walking along pavements, public areas and streets. By diverting all their attention (both visual and in most cases mental) onto their device, the users may bump into other people, fall over uneven surfaces or even step into traffic lanes, with potentially fatal results. A number of deaths among teenagers in the UK, for example, is attributable to this cause each year. A second problem must be the rather anti-social nature of people focussing all their thoughts on a device, to the exclusion of others around them, who may need help or guidance as much as basic courtesy. The increasingly impolite atmosphere in many public spaces may well be connected to this phenomenon.

Turning to possible solutions, it would be helpful to see a joint initiative between the authorities and mobile phone producers to raise public awareness of these risks. Such a programme could take many forms, ranging from advertising to dedicated classes in schools and colleges, and could be aimed at both the problem of accidents and the unsociable nature of excessive device usage, which would make it very cost-effective. A further solution may be to install warning mechanisms on these devices, which detect when traffic or obstacles are nearby, so that the user does not walk blindly into danger. Such systems already exist in cars to alert drivers to impending trouble or the need to change direction.

Overall, the dangers in this situation are both physical and social. Potential remedies may involve better education, and also enhanced danger detection along the lines already used successfully in motor vehicles.

(321 words)

Examiner's notes

This candidate has answered the Task in an imaginative way, with organisation which makes the essay clear and persuasive and achieving Band 9. The intro impressed me immediately, with its clear outline of the essay and use of 'counter-measures' as a synonym for 'solutions.'

The 'problems' section proposes physical and social dangers, and both are supported by relevant evidence (although I would have liked to see something a bit more definite as evidence for the 'anti-social' idea.) The candidate uses the 'By + -ing . . . the (subject) may + verb' structure ('By diverting all their attention onto their device, the users may bump into . . .) to explain the physical problem; this is a simple device which works well here.

The 'solutions' section is quite creative ('joint initiative' and 'warning system' ideas) and the ways of implementing the 'initiative' are clearly explained ('could take many forms, ranging from advertising to dedicated classes . . .') using 'would' and 'could' to show that this is an idea, not a reality. It would be awkward to use 'will' or 'must' in these situations. The writer links between the sentences well using 'such' (eg '. . . these risks. Such a programme' '. . . blindly into danger. Such systems . . .'

The summary uses fresh vocabulary to sum up, which impressed me again.

The language throughout is advanced, and shows a strong grasp of collocations (eg 'Potentially fatal, anti-social, increasingly impolite, joint initiative, walk blindly, impending trouble.') Phrases such as 'Turning to possible solutions' and 'along the lines already used' add to the very natural tone of the essay.

Example Task 13

Some governments today seek to monitor the general public's electronic communications (in the form of phone calls, texts and emails) saying that this reduces crime. Many people oppose this, however, saying that it erodes individual freedoms.

Discuss the aspects of this debate, and give your own conclusion to the discussion.

Explanation of the Task

This is another Opinion>Discussion type Task. There is quite a lot of information in the instruction; you are not expected to discuss the differences between 'phone calls, texts and emails' but focus on the principle of 'monitoring' and 'reducing crime' versus 'individual freedoms.'

Notice how the candidate's plan connects the 'against monitoring' paragraph to the 'against monitoring' conclusion.

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Discussion

Intro: background; confirm 'discussion' type essay

Main Body:

Supporting monitoring:
1 Known to reduce crime (eg in USA)
2 'Nothing to hide, nothing to fear' idea

Against monitoring:
1 Breach of liberties (eg would we allow police to search our homes?)
2 Very low conviction rate; better to act on specific information

Conclusion: monitoring does not justify loss of freedom; police need to be more focussed

Band 9 Model Essay

It is admirable that governments seek to reduce criminality, and are prepared to use modern methods to achieve this. However, the arguments on both sides of this particular discussion (about monitoring private electronic correspondence) are by no means straightforward, as we shall see now.

On the one hand, those who favour the interception of private digital messages and calls say

that only by doing so can criminal messages be tracked and the culprits detained. Indeed, there are many examples of violent and sexual criminals (especially in the USA) who have been caught by these methods. A further argument is that people with nothing to hide should have nothing to fear from being monitored, and that monitoring is an exercise in public safety, rather like CCTV or having police officers watch a large crowd for potential trouble-makers. Such arguments are persuasive and are often used by media supporters of interception and monitoring.

By contrast, though, other people point to the fundamental breach of civil liberties which this policing activity involves. After all, they say, we would not allow the police to search our homes entirely at random, or open our paper correspondence without reason, purely on the chance of finding something incriminating. Another counter-argument is the extremely small number of convictions that actually stem from these methods, compared to the overall population. It appears to be true that the security services are most effective when responding to specific information or observations, rather than 'trawling' the entire population's messages in the hope of detecting tiny numbers of criminals.

Overall, I feel that the monitoring of the general population in this way is unjustified, in terms of personal freedoms and the evident lack of effectiveness of such methods. We should urge our police to focus on gaining information through informants and leads from concerned citizens, which would have a higher benefit in terms of conviction rates and consequent public safety.

(317 words)

Examiner's notes

This essay would definitely receive a Band 9 for its clear structure and the way that the writer reports the opposing views before reaching a conclusion.

The intro gives some brief background, and confirms that this will be a 'Discussion' essay. The first main body paragraph reports on the 'supporters' of monitoring effectively by using impersonal or third person structures: 'those who favour' 'A further argument is that.'

The 'opponents' paragraph uses similar structures well: 'By contrast, though, other people point to' 'After all, they say' 'Another counter-argument is' 'It appears to be true that.' These phrases give the essay a very objective and academic tone, which is made even stronger by the well-chosen topic-specific vocabulary such as:

to detain culprits
potential trouble-makers
fundamental breach of civil liberties
convictions/conviction rates
informants and leads

It is not essential for a strong IELTS Task 2 essay to have this level of topic-specific language, but it certainly helps to raise the essay above many others and to justify a Band 9 score.

The conclusion feels logical because it summarises and paraphrases the preceding 'opponents' paragraph which the reader has just digested.

Example Task 14

'A country's museums should always be free for people to visit, whatever the visitor's age, income or nationality.'

To what level do you agree with this idea? Should museums always be free for all visitors?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Opinion>Personal viewpoint type Task. Remember the importance of having a balanced conclusion (an opinion with 'as long as . . . or 'provided that . . .' or similar) after the small concession paragraph. The instructions are inviting you to think about the matter of 'always free' and 'all visitors'; note how this candidate covers this aspect in his conclusion.

Student's Plan

Essay Type: Opinion>Personal viewpoint

Introduction: Museums' importance; free entry is unnecessary

Main Body:
1 Most visitors able to pay (eg London)
2 Fees can be used to help museums (new displays etc)
3 Many museums are private anyway, subsidies would be impossible

Concession: Free museums are a national symbol; but fees would help them, though not for children etc

Conclusion: Charges are justifiable, provided there are exemptions

Band 9 Model Essay

Museums are a vital part of any nation's cultural life, and high visitor numbers are a desirable indicator of their health and popularity. However, it seems to me that making museums universally free is unnecessary, and even counter-productive, in our efforts to make them more attractive.

For one thing, we should remember that many potential visitors to museums are able to pay an admission charge and would not object to this. For example, in London we see many thousands of wealthy tourists who have paid large sums to travel, and for whom a modest entry charge would be no inconvenience. Indeed, applying a small fee would enable museums to collect revenue which could be used to conserve the exhibits, extend the collections and put on further displays and so on. This would in turn make the institution more attractive, so that more visitors arrive. The Guggenheim

museums in the USA and Europe are an interesting example of museums which constantly refresh their contents in this way. Finally, we should remember that not all museums are publicly owned, and indeed there are numerous smaller, private institutions (for example in Russia or the Middle East) which rely on entry fees to survive. Abolishing such fees would be vastly expensive in terms of state subsidies, and would surely have little impact on visitor numbers.

Admittedly, I agree with those who say that universally free museums are a symbol of an equal and advanced society, showcasing national heritage and learning for everyone. However, the use of affordable entry fees (certainly with exemptions for children, the unemployed, students and others) may well add to the museums' effectiveness as such showcases.

Overall, I feel that modest charges are justifiable, and indeed useful, in our efforts to broaden access and improve our museums, provided that nobody is excluded on the grounds of cost.

(304 words)

Examiner's notes

This candidate has evidently planned his essay carefully, because he has quite a complex opinion (fees are justifiable, and even helpful, but with exemptions) which he expresses with a persuasive series of ideas.

The only real weakness in this essay for me is the quality of the examples (London, Guggenheim, Russia, Middle East) which don't add much concrete evidence; on the other hand, this can be a difficult topic to think of evidence/examples, and so I would not reduce the Band score because of this. In fact, I would award a Band 9 because of the clear structure and well developed argument.

The introduction gives the opinion effectively, and alerts me to the 'universally free' part of the argument.

The main body is extremely well staged, with signposting to show the development:

'For one thing . . . For example . . . Indeed . . . This would in turn . . . Finally . . .'

The use of 'Admittedly . . . However' in the concession is a classic way to organise this important section.

The writer uses 'we' ('we should remember' etc) to avoid personalisation; where he uses 'I' ('I agree, I feel') this is part of giving opinion in the concession and conclusion, and so seems natural in this context. The conclusion has a balanced view which comes logically out of the main body and the concession, with the point about 'exemptions.'

Example Task 15

It is sometimes said that governments should dedicate a fixed proportion of their country's income to foreign aid each year, and this fixed proportion should always be donated to other countries. Opponents of this idea, however, say that aid should have no fixed proportion, and help should only be sent to other countries at times when it is really needed.

What are the arguments on both sides of this debate? What is your own view on the matter?

Explanation of the Task

This is an Opinion>Discussion type Task. It is not asking you to discuss foreign aid by itself, but the way it should be given (either fixed amounts or as necessary.)

Student's Plan

Essay type: Opinion>Discussion

Intro: International cooperation is important; clarify 'discussion' type structure

For quotas:
1 Moral duty, especially ex-empire countries (UK etc)
2 easier for recipient countries to budget

Against quotas:
1 Budget becomes inefficient, corrupt (eg developing countries)
2 More money would be available for emergencies (floods etc)

Conclusion: Better not to have quotas; better to send funds as needed

Band 9 Model Essay

The issue of foreign aid goes to the heart of how nations should cooperate together, and whether this should be on a 'quota' system or more 'as needed.' In this often heated debate, the opposing arguments can perhaps be summarised as follows.

Proponents of the quota system claim that wealthier nations have a moral duty to sacrifice some of their income to help poorer countries, and that this duty does not rise or fall depending on circumstances. This argument is often used to justify the quota arrangement for former imperial states such as Holland, France or Britain. Moreover, the arguments goes, the fixed proportion system allows the receiving countries to plan and budget reliably, building the foreign aid into their economic

calculations.

However, opponents of the fixed donation system respond that this budgetary aspect is in fact the most damaging aspect of the idea. They point out that, if aid money is provided regardless of whether it is actually needed, the funds become part of the recipient country's administrative system, with all the dangers of inefficiency and corruption that this involves. It must be said that fixed aid to some developing countries falls into this trap, as even the local charities themselves will agree. What is more, if aid funds could be held back until times of emergency, such as floods, famine or civil war, the money available would then be far higher and thus would help more people in distress.

To conclude, it appears to me that opponents of the quota system have the more robust argument, with their concerns over unnecessary donations which reduce emergency funding in future. We all recognise a moral duty to help those in need, but surely these resources should be targeted more strictly towards sufferers, rather than sent permanently to government departments to become part of the local economy.

(305 words)

Examiner's notes

The language in this essay shows a good command of both general argumentative terms and topic-specific vocabulary. The introduction provides background to the debate and then outlines the content ('opposing arguments . . . as follows.')

The main body uses noun persons effectively to introduce the contrasting view ('proponents/opponents') and uses third person reporting to avoid confusing these views with the writer's views:

'This argument is often used to'
'Moreover, the arguments goes'
'They point out that'

In the conclusion paragraph, the candidate refers back to this impersonal approach:

'opponents of the quota system have the more robust argument'

This is a useful way to unify the conclusion and the preceding paragraph in a 'Discussion' type essay. General English phrases such as 'goes to the heart of' 'with all the dangers of' and 'It must be said that' also help to build a cohesive academic-style argument without using especially formal language.

The topic-specific vocabulary is quite impressive here, with eg 'former imperial states' 'a moral duty to sacrifice some of their income' 'inefficiency and corruption' 'floods, famine or civil war' and 'targeted more strictly' all giving a sense that the writer has read about the topic somewhere in the media.

I would want to recognise this very cohesive structure and effective language with a Band 9 score.

Overview: The IELTS Academic Task 2 essay types

There are two possible types of IELTS Academic Task 2 writing Tasks: OPINION Tasks and IDEAS Tasks. Let's explain the difference, because this is very important.

Firstly, there are OPINION Tasks, which ask for your opinion on a topic, such as whether you think something is good or bad. These OPINION Tasks take two forms.

Some of these are OPINION > DISCUSSION Tasks, which typically say 'Some people think that X is a good thing, while other people disagree. Discuss both sides and give your own view.' Remember that the exact words used could be different (for example, it might say 'consider both aspects' or similar) but the concept will be the same. In these OPINION > DISCUSSION Tasks, you should write about each side of the discussion, and finally give your opinion at the end of your essay.

The other type of OPINION Task is the OPINION > PERSONAL VIEWPOINT Task. These Tasks typically say 'X is a good thing. To what extent do you agree with this statement?' Again, the exact words will often vary (for example, it might say 'Many people support the suggestion of X. How far do you support this proposal?') but the concept will be the same. In these OPINION > PERSONAL VIEWPOINT Tasks, you should state your personal viewpoint at the beginning of the essay, and then explain why you have this opinion.

The second type of Task are IDEAS Tasks, which ask you to think of some ideas on a topic (such as the reasons for a problem or some ways to solve it) or to evaluate a situation. In these IDEAS Tasks, you will get high marks for thinking of a number of ideas on the topic, but you will lose marks if you give a strong personal opinion.
The common IDEAS Tasks are IDEAS > PROBLEM/SOLUTION, IDEAS > CAUSE/EFFECT and IDEAS > EVALUATE.

Sometimes, an IDEAS type Task will mix different elements, for example by asking you about Problems and Effects or about Causes and Solutions.

This book has examples and explanations of all these types.

In the exam, you should analyze the Task carefully before you start writing, to make sure you understand which type you need to write. Ask yourself: is this an OPINION or an IDEAS Task? Is it asking me to give my personal view, or is it asking me to think of some ideas on a topic? Which type of OPINION or IDEAS Task is it? Then you should spend a few minutes planning your essay with some simple notes.

Don't try to write anything very different in structure from the models in this book. These model essays are exactly what the examiners want to see from you. Read our model essays, and then practice writing your own essays in a similar way.

The most common mistakes in IELTS academic writing

Using contractions (for example 'I don't think' or 'We can't say') **instead of the full form** ('I do not think' or 'we cannot say.') Never use contractions in academic writing.

Writing too few words. If you write much less than the required word count, the examiner has to reduce your score, even if your essay is good quality. You should count the number of words in your essay after each paragraph and keep a continuous total; this way, you can be sure of reaching at least 250 words in 40 minutes.

Writing too many words. The examiner is paid to mark on an 'essay per hour basis,' and so will not read the end of an essay if it exceeds the minimum word count by more than about 100 words. This means he or she will not see the end of your argument, and your score will reduce considerably. Remember: 250 words minimum, and about 350 words maximum in Academic Task 2 writing.

Having handwriting that is difficult to read. IELTS is still a handwritten exam, and the examiners will not spend time trying to understand your writing. You must make sure that your handwriting can be read quickly. You should focus on writing clearly when you do your practice essays. Ask friends or other students to give you an honest opinion about whether your writing is easy to read.

Using informal words (for example 'a nice idea' or 'a silly thing to do') **instead of academic words** (for example 'a positive idea' or 'a regrettable thing to do.') Remember that academic vocabulary is different from the language you would use in English when talking to friends.

Giving personal opinion in an IDEAS type Task. Check if the Task is asking for your opinion or not. The first question you should ask yourself is 'Is this an OPINION or an IDEAS Task?'

Telling stories about your personal history, friends or family. The Task tells you to use 'examples from your own experience,' but this does **not** mean describing stories from your life or people you know! It means describing examples of things in the world that you know about, have studied or have learned about in the media.

Giving evidence which is too detailed or specific to a subject. You may be an expert in a particular social or scientific field, but the examiner probably has a different specialty. You need to make your ideas and examples accessible to a general reader. For example, if the Task topic is about money and you are an accountant, do not use specialized accounting terms.

Being emotional or too dramatic when giving your opinion in an OPINION Task. You may feel strongly about issues such as animals or crime, but academic writing must be unemotional. So avoid phrases such as 'a disgusting idea' or 'I detest this concept.' It is much better to say 'an unacceptable idea' or 'I disapprove of this concept,' which is more impersonal and academic; similar to the type of writing that people use in business reports or university essays.

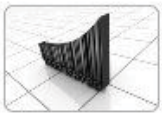
Not following the basic structures presented in this book. The examiners want to see a clear, well-structured essay that is easy to read. They are accustomed to seeing the structures we have presented in this book, and they will feel more positive about your essay if they can recognize these structures in what you write.

Give the examiners what they want, and they will reward you with a high score, even if there are some grammatical mistakes in your English.

More from Cambridge IELTS Consultants

We publish a wide range of advice books on the IELTS Academic Writing and IELTS Speaking tests, which many candidates have used to increase their band scores considerably.

Please see our Amazon page for all our latest books, using this link for the Amazon UK site:



And this link for Amazon USA:

***