

IELTS® Writing: Grammar and Vocabulary

Erica L. Meltzer

■ THE CRITICAL READER

New York | Vancouver

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ISBN-13: 978-1-7335895-7-4

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Table of Contents

<p>Introduction . . . 9</p> <p>A Note About the English in this Guide . . . 13</p> <p>IELTS Writing Cheat Sheet . . . 14</p> <p>Parts of Speech . . . 18</p>
<p>Basic Conventions and Punctuation</p> <p><i>1. Paragraphs . . . 24</i></p> <p><i>2. Capitalization and Spacing . . . 24</i></p> <p><i>3. Apostrophes . . . 26</i></p> <p><i>4. Numbers . . . 27</i></p> <p><i>5. Register: Formal vs Informal . . . 28</i></p>
<p>Definite and Indefinite Articles</p> <p><i>6. Articles with Singular Nouns . . . 40</i></p> <p><i>7. Articles with Plural Nouns . . . 45</i></p> <p><i>8. Articles with Geographic Locations . . . 49</i></p> <p><i>9. Articles with Nationalities . . . 50</i></p>
<p>Sentence Construction</p> <p><i>10. Elements of a Sentence . . . 52</i></p> <p><i>11. Conjunctions and Sentence Types . . . 56</i></p> <p><i>12. Comma Splices with Pronouns . . . 60</i></p> <p><i>13. Dependent Clauses: Verbs and Punctuation . . . 62</i></p> <p><i>14. Preposition + Which . . . 65</i></p> <p><i>15. Too Many Clauses . . . 66</i></p> <p><i>16. Parallel Structure . . . 67</i></p>

Verb Forms, Tenses, and Modes

- 17. Tense Consistency . . . 72**
- 18. Present Tense: Simple vs. Continuous . . . 73**
- 19. Present vs. Future vs. Conditional . . . 74**
- 20. Present Perfect vs. Simple Past . . . 76**
- 21. Past Continuous . . . 81**
- 22. Past Perfect . . . 82**
- 23. Past Conditional . . . 83**
- 24. Future Perfect . . . 83**
- 25. Sequence of Tenses: Conditionals . . . 84**
- 26. Sequence of Tenses: Indirect Speech . . . 85**
 - **Common Irregular Verbs: Principal Parts . . . 87**
- 27. Modal Verb + Bare Infinitive Only . . . 88**
- 28. Direct Questions . . . 89**
- 29. Passive Voice . . . 90**

Subject-Verb Agreement

- 30. Third-Person Singular vs. Plural . . . 94**
- 31. Agreement with Indefinite Pronouns . . . 99**

Pronouns and Nouns

- 32. Omitted and Unnecessary Pronouns . . . 102**
- 33. Agreement with It and They . . . 103**
- 34. Additional Pronouns . . . 106**
- 35. Noun Agreement . . . 109**
- 36. Reflexive Pronouns . . . 110**
- 37. People vs. Things . . . 112**
- 38. Commas with That, Which, and Who . . . 116**
- 39. Indirect Questions . . . 118**

Modifiers

- 40. Adjective Placement . . . 122**
- 41. Order of Adjectives . . . 124**
- 42. Compound Adjectives (Hyphens) . . . 124**
- 43. "Trick" Nouns as Adjectives . . . 125**
- 44. -ING vs. -ED as Adjectives . . . 126**
- 45. Comparatives and Superlatives . . . 127**
- 46. Comparing Amounts . . . 130**
- 47. Adverb Placement . . . 134**
- 48. Adverbs of Degree . . . 136**
- 49. Commonly Confused Adjectives and Adverbs . . . 137**
- 50. Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers . . . 140**

Essay- and Letter Writing Tips

- 51. Using Transitions Effectively . . . 142**
- 52. Letter-Writing Conventions . . . 148**
- 53. Writing About Graph(ic)s . . . 151**
- 54. Task 2 Introduction and Conclusion . . . 172**
- 55. Presenting Opinions . . . 174**
- 56. How Much Should You Explain? . . . 178**

Vocabulary

- 57. Using Vocabulary Appropriately . . . 182**
- 58. Increasing and Decreasing . . . 187**
- 59. Younger and Older People . . . 191**
- 60. Describing Your Education . . . 193**
- 61. Describing Types of Work . . . 194**
- 62. Talking, Speaking, and Discussing . . . 196**
- 63. Requests and Recommendations . . . 199**
- 64. Giving Permission (The Causative) . . . 200**
- 65. Commonly Over- and Misused Words . . . 201**
- 66. Commonly Confused/Misspelled Words . . . 205**
- 67. Tricky Uncountable Nouns . . . 208**

Prepositions and Collocations

68. Top Preposition-Based Expressions . . . 210

69. Verbs with Infinitives and Gerunds . . . 213

70. Expressions with Make, Do, and Get . . . 214

Appendix: Common Terms by Category

- **Arts and Entertainment . . . 216**
- **Business and Economy . . . 216**
- **Cities and Transport . . . 217**
- **Diet, Health, and Fitness. . . 217**
- **Education . . . 218**
- **Environment . . . 218**
- **Family . . . 219**
- **Government and Politics . . . 219**
- **Housing . . . 219**
- **Legal . . . 220**
- **Media . . . 220**
- **Technology . . . 221**
- **Travel . . . 221**
- **Covid-19 . . . 222**

About the Author . . . 223

Introduction

This is not a traditional grammar book, nor is it a comprehensive one. It concentrates exclusively on common areas of difficulty for IELTS® candidates, based on an analysis of more than a hundred essays by writers scoring primarily in Bands 6 and 6.5. However, it also covers many topics that even advanced English-language learners (and, for that matter, some native speakers) find challenging, and you are likely to find some value in it even if you are already scoring at Band 7 or above. This guide also places a heavy emphasis on contemporary idiomatic usage: it covers constructions that you may never have encountered in a classroom but that are frequently used by native anglophones. And while it does use grammatical terminology as necessary, its focus is always on practical application: grammatical principles are continually and explicitly illustrated in the types of sentences required throughout Task 1 and Task 2 responses (both Academic and General Training).

IELTS Writing has a reputation as the most unforgiving of the exam's four sections, and deservedly so: according to the demographic statistics provided by the British Council¹, average scores in Writing are lower than those in the other three sections in virtually every country, and often run nearly a full band lower than scores in Listening, Reading, and Speaking. This holds true for test-takers from every country and native language, including English. (Note that the mean band score in Writing is a mere 6.2 for native English speakers in Academic Training, and 6.5 in General Training.)

Given the size and consistency of this gap, it is not a surprise that myths and misconceptions about the Writing section abound. It is not uncommon to hear students who have repeatedly fallen short of their target Writing score claim that the IELTS is a scam and that examiners deliberately deflate scores in order to force students to pay for repeated examinations. To be absolutely fair, there is always an element of subjectivity involved in essay grading, and some Enquiries on Results do in fact result in Writing scores being revised upwards. But that said, having read an enormous number of essays by students who have received band scores of 6 or 6.5, I can also attest to the fact that responses in Band 6 (B2 level, or upper-intermediate) generally receive that score for good reason, and that for many candidates, moving up to Band 7 (C1 level, or lower-advanced) represents a very significant challenge indeed. It is not a matter of learning a few simple tricks, or of sprinkling in a few "high-level" words such as *plethora* and *aforementioned*. Rather, it is the difference between writing with English words and writing *in English*. Essays that score Band 7+ may contain isolated errors in grammar or vocabulary, but the overall structure of the language is solid.

The most important thing to understand about IELTS Writing is that you are being assessed on your ability to use standard written English as a vehicle for your ideas. The question is not whether you know how to use a particular set of high-level or “complex” constructions but rather whether you are able to select the structures and vocabulary most appropriate for expressing thoughts relevant to the question at hand, and to use those features of English accurately.

One of the more serious misunderstandings about IELTS essays stems from the Band-7 requirement for “complex” sentences. Contrary to what many candidates believe, this does not imply that essays need to be packed with complicated constructions; it merely means that some sentences must include different types of clauses. (For example, *Although zoos play an important role in preserving endangered species, I believe that animals should remain in the wild* is a complex sentence.) Likewise, “less common vocabulary” refers to subject-specific terms (for example *green energy*, *net-zero emissions*, and *carbon neutral* in an essay about environmental issues) rather than to rarely used words such as *salubrious*.

The other, exceedingly important issue that many IELTS candidates are often unaware of is the importance of adhering to the conventions and niceties of standard written English. If you are accustomed to using English primarily for gaming or posting on Internet forums, and have limited experience writing in more formal situations, you may not realize the importance of elements such as capital letters and spacing. For example, placing a comma immediately after a word and leaving exactly one space before the next word, *every single time*, is a fundamental part of writing correctly in English—you cannot randomly add or omit spaces. This is true not only for the IELTS but for any academic or professional situation in which you might find yourself. To put it bluntly, you cannot obtain a high Writing score if your prose looks as if it were produced by an Internet bot!

The good news is that once English learners reach an upper-intermediate level, most of their difficulties tend to be concentrated in a limited number of areas. The bad news, however, is that these areas involve some of the most common constructions in the entire English language (for example, definite and indefinite articles). As a result, mistakes involving them are typically not restricted to isolated phrases; rather, they appear throughout a response and thus have a disproportionate effect on the overall score. In order to fix misunderstandings in these areas, you must first become aware of them.

Officially, “Grammar” is only one of the four categories in which Writing responses are assessed, the others being “Lexical Resource” (vocabulary); “Coherence and Cohesion”; and “Task Achievement” (Task 1) or “Task Response (Task 2). In reality, however, there

is considerable overlap among these areas, and grammar is the foundation on which your ability to express yourself clearly and convincingly rests. Simply put, essays are made up of sentences, and so **you cannot write a coherent essay in English unless you can write a coherent sentence in English**. Writing that contains flaws at a basic structural level prevents you from conveying your ideas with precision, which in turn impedes your ability to stay on task as well as develop your answers in ways that directly support your arguments. In the worst case, you may accidentally imply the opposite of your intended meaning.

Moreover, aspects of the non-grammar categories involve grammar, both directly and indirectly: your skill at linking nouns and pronouns, for instance, is factored into your Coherence and Cohesion score. And any attempt at using sophisticated vocabulary or idioms/collocations will almost certainly backfire if the words or phrases appear within a sentence that reads as if it were translated directly from another language.

So while this guide does include some longer sample passages, the focus here is on the details of constructing accurate and idiomatic statements at the sentence level. For full-length essays, there are a number of websites run by native English speakers (some of whom are former examiners) that provide excellent examples of model high-scoring answers: these include www.ieltssetc.com, www.ieltsliz.com, www.ielts-simon.com, and www.ted-ielts.com.

When you read sample high-band essays, notice that the writers maintain a generally straightforward style and do not try too hard to make their writing seem original or poetic. IELTS candidates are frequently warned that they should not attempt to learn answers by heart, and this is of course excellent advice—memorizing a series of phrases, or even an entire essay, on a given topic and then attempting to “twist” it to fit a question on an unrelated subject is an extraordinarily bad idea, and under no circumstances should it be encouraged. That said, standard written English relies on many conventions and idiomatic phrasings that must be learned word-for-word, and that sound obviously wrong when altered. However, when students are not made aware of this fact, they may attempt to “improve” on standard formulations in an attempt to sound more original, and as a result form wildly unidiomatic constructions. This is particularly common with linking devices (transitional words and phrases). For example, a student may write *on the dark side* instead of the standard *on the other hand*. Unfortunately, this is precisely the opposite of what is required to achieve a high score: according to the IELTS band descriptors, a Band 9 essay is one that “uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention”.

Likewise, the word “formal” is responsible for many misconceptions about what sort of language the Task 2 essay involves. In reality, it is more accurately described as a “semi-formal” or “moderately formal” essay; the most formal kind of English—the kind found in legal documents, for example—is not expected. But when these definitions are not explained, students may assume that they need to fill every sentence with overblown language and obscure vocabulary (often improperly used), a practice that results in prose that is at best stiff and excessively formal, and at worst barely comprehensible.

In reality, achieving a Band 7+ Writing score is both easier and harder than many IELTS candidates realize. It is easier in the sense that it is perfectly possible to score well using mainstream, relatively common vocabulary and one- and two-clause sentences, with an occasional longer one thrown in for variety. However, it is also more challenging in the sense that those basics need to be done correctly—and by definition, writing at an “advanced” level means getting most things right. There is some room for error, of course, but less than what many people imagine; range cannot compensate for too many problems in accuracy. Even a test-taker whose writing contains only “very occasional errors or inappropriacies” will receive a score no higher than 8 in Grammar. So while some of the points covered in this guide may seem minor or overly picky, they are in fact designed to target the types of errors that, taken together, can rapidly cause a Grammar score to drop to Band 6 or lower.

It is also important to recognize that there is no way to hide or compensate for basic misunderstandings with fancy vocabulary, or idioms, or even just good ideas. Examiners know all the tricks, and they won’t be fooled. So although it may seem counterintuitive, making the necessary progress is likely to require taking a step back and 1) discovering where your trouble spots lie, and 2) getting solid on the fundamentals that you never quite mastered. That’s where this book comes in. Although this approach can be tedious, it is far more constructive than churning out lots of full-length responses with the same mistakes made over and over again. In the long term, taking the time to build a solid foundation is much more likely to get you where you want to go.

–Erica Meltzer

A Note About the English in this Guide

Although the IELTS exam is administered by the British Council, it is intended for an international audience, and you are free to use whatever form of English you are accustomed to; there is no penalty for using American spellings. The only requirement is that you be consistent, e.g., if you write *colour*, you should not then write *neighbor*. You are free to mix vocabulary, as anglophones often do. The major differences are as follows:

British Commonwealth (Br.)	United States (Am.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -i/-yse (<i>emphasise, analyse</i>) • -our (<i>colour, neighbour</i>) • -l and -s endings doubled before a suffix, e.g., <i>traveller, focusses</i> • <i>learnt, burnt</i> • <i>centre, theatre, litre</i> • <i>offence, defence</i> • <i>programme</i> • <i>practise</i> (v.; <i>practice</i>, n.) • <i>cheque</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -i/-yze (<i>emphasize, analyze</i>) • -or (<i>color, neighbor</i>) • -l and -s endings not doubled before a suffix, e.g., <i>traveler, focuses</i> • <i>learned, burned</i> • <i>center, theater, liter</i> • <i>offense, defense</i> • <i>program*</i> • <i>practice</i> (n., v.) • <i>check</i> <p style="text-align: right; margin-right: 20px;">*also used in Canada and Australia</p>

This guide addresses the UK/US divide by following Canadian conventions: US-style -ize and -yze endings are used for words such as *analyze* and *globalization*, whereas British Commonwealth spellings are followed for other words. This choice is designed to reflect the international nature of the exam, as well as the fact that IELTS candidates intend to live in anglophone countries with a variety of linguistic conventions.

The examples in this guide—like IELTS essay questions—are intended to be as broad and general as possible, focusing on topics in which differences between various types of English are essentially irrelevant. Unless you are already communicating at a near-native level, you do not need to worry about regional terms or minor stylistic issues. Your primary concern should be learning to construct clear, coherent sentences that can be easily understood in everyday professional and academic contexts.

IELTS Writing Cheat Sheet

- 1. Standard spacing:** full stops/periods, commas, and semicolons are placed right after a word, with one space before the following word.
- 2. Always capitalize the first word in a sentence;** the pronoun I; and the names of specific people, places, and things (e.g., *Robert, Mexico, Infosys*).
- 3. Contractions (e.g., *don't, wasn't*) = informal;** use only in Task 1 GT letters to friends. Do not ever use slang (e.g., *gonna, wanna*) or textspeak (e.g., u for *you*).
- 4. A(n) = indefinite,** indicates a noun in general or one of many; often used when a noun is first mentioned.
The = definite, indicates the only one; used with superlatives (e.g., *the best way*); with *first, second, etc.* + noun (e.g., *the first time*) and often when a noun is mentioned again.
- 5. Articles and indefinite pronouns:** *Few* = almost no (one); *A few* = several; *The majority*; *A number of* (=many).
- 6. Focus on correct usage** rather than obscure or "high-level" words; when paraphrasing, use synonyms whose meanings you are absolutely certain of.
- 7. Linking devices = formulas;** do not alter phrases such as *on the other hand* in an attempt to sound more original.
- 8. Two sentences must be separated by a full stop/period, NOT a comma.** This is a common issue when a conjunctive adverb (e.g., *however, therefore, in fact*) begins a clause, or the subject is a pronoun rather than a noun (e.g., *it has increased*).
- 9. Two consecutive clauses** should not both begin with a coordinating conjunction (e.g., *and, but, so*) or a subordinating conjunction (e.g., *although, while, as*).
- 10. Modal verb + bare infinitive (e.g., *can make*),** NOT conjugated verb or past tense (e.g., *can to make* or *can made*). Exception: *ought* + infinitive.
- 11. Request, recommend, and suggest + (that) + subject + bare infinitive** (e.g., *She suggested (that) I restart the laptop*, NOT *She suggested me to restart the laptop*).

- 12. Present perfect:** *since* + starting time (e.g. *I have studied English since 2011*); *for* + duration (e.g., *I have studied English for 10 years*).
- 13. Simple past** (e.g., *went*) = finished action, used with a date or time; **Past perfect** (e.g., *had gone*) = finished action that came before a second action.
- 14. Will = future; Would = hypothetical actions** or polite form, used for requests.
- 15. When or if + present tense** (e.g., *When I go to Canada*), not future tense.
- 16. 3rd-person singular verbs end in -s** (e.g., *it increases*); 3rd-person plural verbs do not end in -s (e.g., *they increase*).
- 17. One + sing. noun** (e.g., *one effect*); *One of the* + pl. noun (e.g., *one of the effects*).
- 18. Singular noun** = *it(s)* or *it's* (= it is); Plural noun = *they*.
- 19. That:** no comma before or after.
- 20. Indirect questions:** use a full stop/period, NOT a question mark; verb follows subject (e.g., *I don't know why the package hasn't arrived yet*).
- 21. Nouns acting as modifiers are never made plural** (e.g., *One of my favourite dishes is lentil soup*, NOT *One of my favourite dishes is lentils soup*.)
- 22. Comparatives and Superlatives:** 1-syllable adjective & 2-syllable adjective ending in -y: -er / -est (e.g., *harder, funniest*). All others = *more / most* + adjective (e.g., *more careful, most important*).
- 23. Uncountable:** *advice, furniture, information, infrastructure, research*.
- 24. Many, fewer** modify countable nouns; *much, less* modify uncountable nouns.
- 25. Prepositions/Idioms:**
- *I'm looking forward to* + -ing form (e.g., *I'm looking forward to going to London*).
 - Use *on* + day OR *next* + day (e.g., *I'll do it on Tuesday*, OR *I'll do it next Tuesday*), NOT *on next* + day (e.g., *I'll do it on next Tuesday*).
 - *Considered (to be)* + noun (e.g., *He is considered (to be) one of the greatest football players*, NOT *He is considered as one of the greatest football players*).

Parts of Speech

Verbs

Verbs indicate actions (e.g., *to play, to work, to believe*) and states of being (e.g., *to be, to become, to seem, to appear*).

The "to" form of a verb is called the **infinitive**. An infinitive without the word *to* is called the **bare infinitive**.

When a verb follows a subject (noun or pronoun), it must be conjugated. In most cases, this simply involves removing the *to*; however, when the subject is a third-person singular (pronoun), an -s is added to the end of the verb (e.g., *it increases*).

To be and *to have* are the most common English verbs. You must be able to conjugate them correctly and recognize their present and past forms.

To Be, Present	
I am	We are
You are	You (pl.) are
S/he, It, One is	They are

To Be, Past	
I was	We were
You were	You were
S/he, It, One was	They were

To have: I, you, we, they **have**; s/he, it, one, **has**.

The past tense of *have* is **had**, invariable.

Transitive verbs must be followed by a noun or pronoun (direct object).

Correct: An increasing number of young people spend hours **playing** video games or **surfing** the Internet every day.

Intransitive verbs are followed by preposition + noun (indirect object).

Correct: An increasing number of young people spend hours **looking at** screens every day.

Nouns

Nouns indicate people, places, and things.

Most plural nouns add -s at the end (e.g., *job, jobs; action, actions*).

Nouns ending in -y drop that letter and add -ies (e.g., *supply, supplies*).

Nouns ending in -s, -ch, -sh, and -x add -es (e.g., *loss, losses; wish, wishes; box, boxes*).

Nouns ending in -eaf, -lf, or -rf drop the -f and add -ves (e.g., *half, halves; scarf, scarves*).

A small number of high-frequency nouns have **irregular** plural forms:

Singular	Plural
Child	Children
Foot	Feet
Fish	Fish
Person	People

Proper nouns indicate specific people (e.g., *Bill Gates*); geographical locations (e.g., *Tokyo, Brazil, Asia, the Alps*); titles (e.g., *The Economist*); organizations, companies, and brands (e.g., *The World Bank, Amazon*); political parties (e.g., *Labour*); and schools, colleges, and universities (e.g., *Oxford University*). They are **always capitalized**.

Common nouns refer to people, places, and things in general (e.g., *student, park, doctor*). They are **not capitalized** unless used to begin a sentence.

Nouns can also be **concrete** (touchable, e.g., *house, food, computer*) or **abstract** (not touchable, e.g., *idea, belief, thought*). Abstract nouns often have the following endings:

- -ance/-ence: *alliance, patience*
- -ism: *activism, criticism*
- -ity: *creativity, reality*
- -ment: *contentment, excitement*
- -ness: *greatness, happiness*
- -sion/-tion: *extension, innovation*
- -tude: *aptitude, solitude*

To indicate a person who performs an action, add -(e)r to the end of a verb.

- To sell → seller
- To buy → buyer
- To grow → grower

To create a noun from a verb ending in -ect or -act, add -ion.

- React → reaction
- Object → objection
- Elect → election

Pronouns

Pronouns refer back to and replace nouns.

- Genetic engineering is among the most powerful tools of modern science; **it** has the potential to affect many areas of society.
- I last saw the suitcase, **which** was black with a red handle, next to the concierge's desk at the hotel.
- **Many** would argue that zoos are necessary to save endangered species.

Prepositions

Prepositions are "location" and "time" words; they are placed before ("pre-") nouns and pronouns to indicate their position in time and space. Common examples include:

about	around	beneath	from	out
above	at	between	in	to
across	before	by	of	under
after	below	for	on	with(out)

Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition followed by a noun or pronoun.

- Today, most people get their news **from the Internet**.
- The misuse **of genetic engineering** is a serious concern.
- You can wait for my brother **by the taxi stand outside the airport**.

Adjectives

Adjectives modify nouns and other adjectives. They are placed before these words.

Remember that English adjectives are **invariable**; their endings do not change based on whether the nouns they modify are singular or plural.

Correct: Employers' requests for **personal information** can pressure job applicants to provide **false statements**.

Incorrect: Employers' requests for **personal information** can pressure job applicants to provide **falses statements**.

When adjectives are used with "being" verbs, they are placed after the verb.

Correct: As a result of new technologies that allow employees to work at any time, many jobs **are becoming** increasingly **stressful**.

Certain endings are commonly associated with adjectives:

- -ic: *basic, fantastic*
- -ful: *eventful, hopeful*
- -ive: *creative, expensive*

Adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

Most adverbs are formed by adding -ly to the adjective (e.g., *slow, slowly*). However, many adverbs indicating time and frequency are not based on an adjective form and do not end in -ly (e.g., *always, never, sometimes*).

Correct: Property values have **risen** **sharply** in recent years. (modifies verb)

Correct: Video games can be **highly addictive** for children and teenagers. (modifies adjective)

Correct: I do my best to exercise **very often**. (modifies adverb)

Basic Conventions and Punctuation

1. Paragraphs

Your essays **must** be divided into paragraphs. While your introductory and concluding paragraphs can be very short, around two sentences, your body paragraphs should consist of at least four or five sentences and be approximately the same length. (This is somewhat flexible in General Training Task 1 letters.) For Task 2 essays, you should plan to have two well-developed body paragraphs.

2. Capitalization and Spacing

Punctuation marks should immediately follow words, without a space. They should be followed by a space. **A response that does not follow standard rules for capitalization and spacing will immediately give the person marking your essay a very poor impression, and is almost certain to receive a score in Band 6 or below.**

Correct: When students go to **university**, **they** can meet people from around the world.

Incorrect: When students go to **university**,**they** can meet people from around the world.

Incorrect: When students go to **university** , **they** can meet people from around the world.

Incorrect: When students go to **university** ,**they** can meet people from around the world.

Always capitalize:

- The first word of every sentence
- The word /
- Proper names (people, places, organizations, languages)

Correct: **Technology** affects nearly every aspect of our lives. **In** fact, its consequences are virtually impossible to avoid.

Incorrect: **technology** affects nearly every aspect of our lives. **in** fact, its consequences are virtually impossible to avoid.

Correct: Although globalization has numerous detractors, **I** believe it has many positive aspects.

Incorrect: Although globalization has numerous detractors, **i** believe it has many positive aspects.

Correct: In recent years, **Apple** devices have become extremely popular among consumers worldwide.

Incorrect: In recent years, **apple** devices have become extremely popular among consumers worldwide.

Do not capitalize non-proper nouns or other parts of speech, not even for emphasis.

Correct: A good **diet** not only helps people slim down, but it also helps them become healthier overall.

Incorrect: A good **Diet** not only helps people slim down, but it also helps them become healthier overall.

Correct: A good diet does not force people to restrict calories to the point at which they are constantly **hungry**.

Incorrect: A good diet does not force people to restrict calories to the point at which they are constantly **Hungry**.

Non-proper nouns after a comma or semicolons are not capitalized.

Incorrect: On the other hand, **People** should not choose a diet that forces them to restrict calories excessively.

Incorrect: Both diet and exercise are important aspects of a healthy lifestyle; **Therefore**, people should make an attempt to eat well and be physically active.

3. Apostrophes

Possessive, singular noun or an irregular plural noun: **apostrophe + -s**.

Correct: One can learn a lot about a **country's** culture through its food.

Incorrect: One can learn a lot about a **countries** culture through its food.

Correct: Excessive screen time harms **people's** ability to pay attention

Incorrect: Excessive screen time harms **peoples'** ability to pay attention.

Possessive, regular plural noun: **-s + apostrophe**

Correct: **Teenagers'** preferences in terms of food, hobbies, and music are often strongly influenced by their friends.

Incorrect: **Teenager's** preferences in terms of food, hobbies, and music are often strongly influenced by their friends.

Note that the use of **apostrophe + -s** rather than **of + noun** to indicate possession can make your English seem more natural.

Standard: My **brother's car** is a blue Toyota.

Avoid: **The car of my brother** is a blue Toyota.

Apostrophes are also used for contractions between pronouns and verbs.

It's = it is

You're = you are

They're = they are

Correct: The concert starts at 8pm, and I think **it's (= it is)** going to be a lot of fun.

Incorrect: The concert starts at 8pm, and I think **its** going to be a lot of fun.

4. Numbers*

Nouns following numbers other than one (including zero) must be pluralized.

Correct: They expect 500 **guests** to attend the wedding.

Incorrect: They expect 500 **guest** to attend the wedding.

With the exception of times of the day and dates, numbers smaller than 10 should be written out in words.

Correct: I will be going to Auckland on a business trip in **two** weeks.

Incorrect: I will be going to Auckland on a business trip in **2** weeks.

Numbers 10 and above can be written in numerals or in words.

Correct: Technology affects nearly every aspect of life in the **21st** century.

Correct: Technology affects nearly every aspect of life in the **twenty-first** century.

In specific numbers, words denoting large quantities such as hundreds, thousands, millions, billions, etc. are not pluralized. (Note that with millions, billions, and higher, the number can be written in either numerals or words.)

Correct: The Tokyo metropolitan area has almost 40 **million** inhabitants.

Incorrect: The Tokyo metropolitan area has almost 40 **millions** inhabitants.

However, unspecified quantities involving thousands, millions, billions, etc. are pluralized when followed by **of + noun**.

Correct: Many large cities have **millions of inhabitants**.

Ordinal numbers: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th.

Correct: I will be arriving in Auckland on **7th** June (Br.)/June **7th** (Am.) at 5pm.

Incorrect: I will be arriving in Auckland on **7nth** June at 5pm.

*For a more in-depth discussion of numbers, see Chapter 53.

5. Register: Formal vs. Informal

Unless you are asked to write a letter to a friend in GT Task 1, in which case you can use informal language, you should use the same type of moderately formal writing that you would use in any normal academic or professional context.

Even in an informal letter, you cannot use the type of slang or ultra-casual language you might use in a real-life text message or social media post.

With the exception of titles that are normally abbreviated (e.g., Mister), words should be spelled out fully. In addition, you should not use symbols such as the ampersand (&) in place of words.

Correct: I received the home-assembly kit for the dresser I ordered, but unfortunately several **pieces** were missing.

Incorrect: I received the home-assembly kit for the dresser I ordered, but unfortunately several **pcs** were missing.

Correct: When students go to university, they can meet people from around the world **and** be exposed to new cultures **and** traditions.

Incorrect: When students go to university, they can meet people from around the world **&** be exposed to new cultures **&** traditions.

When giving examples, do not use *e.g.*, *i.e.*, *etc.*, or *and so on*.

Correct: I believe that people should make more of an effort to consume healthy foods **such as** salads and fish.

Incorrect: I believe that people should make more of an effort to consume healthy foods, **e.g.**, salads and fish.

Incorrect: I believe that people should make more of an effort to consume healthy foods, such salads, fish, **etc./and so on**.

When a title is not part of a proper name, it should be written out.

Correct: I was unable to attend the meeting yesterday morning because I had an appointment with my **doctor**.

Incorrect: I was unable to attend the meeting yesterday morning because I had an appointment with my **Dr.***

In formal writing, phrases such as *it is* and *did not* are written out; the contracted forms (*it's*, *didn't*) are not used.

Correct: I believe that **it is** necessary for schools to offer physical education classes in order to help children stay healthy.

Incorrect: I believe that **it's** necessary for schools to offer physical education classes in order to help children stay healthy.

On the other hand, if you are instructed to write an informal letter, you should make sure to use contracted forms along with more familiar language. It is also acceptable to include some non-contracted forms.

Correct: **You've** been such a great host, and I really want to thank you for all your help.

Incorrect: **You have** proved to be a very gracious host. Therefore, I wish to convey my regards for your assistance.

In addition, exclamation points are not normally used in formal writing (although they are fine to use in informal Task 1 letters).

Correct: Many people believe that governments should spend more on defence than on social benefits; however, I do not agree with this view.

Avoid: Many people believe that governments should spend more on defence than on social benefits; however, I do not agree with this view!

*In instances where abbreviations of titles are permitted, American English places a full stop/period after the title (e.g., *Mr.*, *Ms.*), whereas British English does not (e.g., *Mr*, *Ms*).

Note that phrasal verbs are often associated with informal writing, while single-word verbs are generally associated with more formal writing.

Phrasal (Less Formal)	Single Word (More Formal)
Ask	Inquire/Enquire
Bring back	Return
Clear up	Clarify
Come up with	Invent
Deal with	Manage
Figure out	Determine
Get back to	Respond
Get up	Awaken
Point out	Mention, Emphasize
Throw away	Discard

Other common informal vs. formal words to know include:

Less Formal	More Formal
A lot/Lots	Many, Numerous
Big (e.g., problem)	Major, Serious, Significant
Buy	Purchase
Folks	People
Get	Receive, Become
Guy	Man
Keen (Br.)	Eager
Kid	Child
Reckon (Br.)	Believe
Rough/Tough	Difficult, Hard, Challenging
So, Really, Totally	Very, Extremely
Sort of	Somewhat
Stuff	Things