

12 Skills You Need for Band 7+ in IELTS Writing

This guide covers 11 of the skills whose mastery generally corresponds to a score of [Band 7 or above](#) in IELTS Writing. It is by no means comprehensive—writing well in English involves far more than what can reasonably be covered here—but I have done my best to select the top concepts that IELTS candidates find particularly challenging, and that apply at a general structural level regardless of the topic or type of question involved.

To be clear: you do not need to be able to do every single thing on this list flawlessly in order to earn a Band 7 score. There is *some* room for error. But you must be able to do most of them, and do them consistently, in order to produce responses that contain mostly error-free sentences; remain clear and on-topic throughout; and are sufficiently cohesive and coherent.

Also, please note: The list below assumes that you know how to use standard spacing, punctuation, and capitalization. If you have difficulty with those aspects of English, you need to work on them [first](#).

1) Register (Formality/Informality)

Responses that receive a Band 7 score employ a **consistently appropriate** level of formality (for Task 2 and Academic Training Task 1) or informality (for General Training Task 1 letters to friends).

For formal writing, that means:

- Formal linking devices (e.g., *however, therefore, moreover*).
- No contracted forms (e.g., *It is* rather than *it's*).
- General avoidance of phrasal verbs and expressions with *get*.
- Only formal idioms (e.g., *My colleagues **speak very highly** of your work*).
- Formal, but not excessively formal, vocabulary. That means you should write *child* instead of *kid* and *difficult* instead of *tough*, but not *In a plethora of manners* instead of *in a variety of ways*.
- No exclamation points.
- Appropriate greetings in letters (e.g., *Dear Mr. Smith, Dear Sir or Madam, To Whom It May Concern*, NEVER *Hi Mam* or *Hello Sir, Ma'am*).

For informal writing, that means:

- Informal linking devices (e.g., *but* and *so*) and avoidance of inappropriately formal ones (e.g., *hence* and *therefore*).
- Contracted forms (*it's* rather than *it is*).
- Use of phrasal verbs and expressions with *get*.
- Informal idioms (e.g., *hit the gym*).
- Informal vocabulary (e.g., *kid* instead of *child*; *tough* instead of *difficult*).
- Exclamation points acceptable.
- Appropriate greetings in letters (e.g., *Hi John*, not *Hello dear*).

In both formal and informal writing, you must also write out full words rather than use abbreviations where they are not normally used (e.g., *I am unable to attend the meeting because I have to see the Dr.*).

2) Linking Devices

As described above, you must use linking devices (i.e., cohesive devices, i.e., transitions) to connect your ideas.

To earn Band 7, you must:

- Use these words and phrases only to support meaning; plugging them in mechanically at the beginning of every sentence will not help your score.
- Use correct punctuation (some devices follow a comma, others a period/full stop or semicolon).
- Use standard phrases and not rewrite common ones to sound more original or creative. **This is a situation in which it is not only acceptable but actually necessary to use memorized phrases.**

3) Articles

If your first language does not have articles equivalent to *a/an* (indefinite) and *the* (definite), you may not realize how important a role these words play in making English sound like English. And if your first language does use articles, you may not realize how English uses them differently.

Correct use of articles is essential to making your English sound natural, and because these words are used so often, they can have a disproportionate effect on your score. To score Band 7, you must therefore know when they are, and are not, required. (You can check your knowledge of articles [here](#).)

4) Countable and Uncountable Nouns

When a noun is uncountable, it is not made plural, nor is it used with the indefinite article (*a/an*).

Uncountable nouns that frequently cause problems for IELTS-takers include:

- Advice
- Congestion (traffic)
- Equipment
- Feedback
- Infrastructure
- Input
- Luggage
- Machinery

For example, the following errors are absolutely typical of Band 6-6.5 writing:

Correct: Factory owners must regularly replace **equipment** that is outdated or in poor condition.

Incorrect: Factory owners must regularly replace **an equipment** that is outdated or in poor condition.

Incorrect: Factory owners must regularly replace **equipments** that are outdated or in poor condition.

Correct: I would appreciate if you could send a draft of the proposal to other members of the team in order to obtain their **feedback/input**.

Incorrect: I would appreciate if you could send a draft of the proposal to other members of the team in order to obtain their **feedbacks/inputs**.

Unfortunately, uncountable nouns must be memorized on an individual basis. While this may be less exciting than learning idioms or slang (**not slangs**), **incorrect use of these words can cause additional problems with overall sentence structure**, e.g., *There **were a lot of congestions** on the road* instead of *There **was a lot of congestion** on the road*. To score Band 7, you must show that you can use these types of nouns correctly, along with verbs and modifiers associated with them.

5) Subject-Verb Agreement

Unlike every other form of present-tense conjugation, third-person singular verbs always take an -s at the end in the present tense. **When you listen to, and speak, English, make sure that you are actively listening for and pronouncing this letter.**

At a basic level, subject-verb agreement is particularly important in Academic Training Task 1. If the first thing you write is *The graph show* rather than *The graph shows* (or: *The graph and the chart shows* rather than *The graph and the chart show*), you are immediately signaling to the examiner that you have not learned this very important aspect of English.

Even if you have mastered simple agreements, there are many complex types of agreement (see [here](#) and [here](#)) that can easily lead to errors. Using these advanced structures correctly is, however, a good way to impress your examiner.

6) Use of Appropriate Verb Tense

While you are not explicitly required to use any particular tenses in order to obtain Band 7 in Writing, you are still expected to use a variety of tenses. **You must not only form verbs accurately, but also select the tense(s) most appropriate for each situation.**

As a general rule, you should keep the tense of your verbs consistent and only change when there is a clear reason to do so. Beyond that, you should know how to use:

- **Simple** and **continuous** forms. For examples, verbs related to being, thinking, and feeling are virtually always used in simple rather than continuous form (e.g., *Many people **believe***, not ***are believing***).
- The **future tense** (*I **will** do*) with "future" words/phrases such as *tomorrow*, *next week*, and *in September*.
- The **present perfect with *for* and *since*** to indicate actions that began in the past and that continue into the present (e.g., *Since the 2010s, smartphones **have become** an indispensable part of many people's lives*).
- The **simple past** rather than the present perfect to describe finished actions in the past (e.g., *In 2018, housing prices **rose***, not *In 2018, housing prices **have risen***).

- **Past participles** rather than simple-past verbs after a form of *to have* (e.g., *prices have risen*, not *prices have rose*).
- The **conditional** with different types of "if" clauses and, in the case of GT Task 1, to form polite constructions (e.g., **Could** you please provide some information?).
- The **passive voice** to form impersonal observations, particularly in AT Task 1 (e.g., *It can be seen that prices dropped in 2011*).

7) Forming Coherent "Complex" Sentences

A "complex" sentence is simply a sentence that contains a main clause (can stand on its own as a sentence) and a dependent clause (can't stand on its own as a sentence).

For example: Although many people believe that technology should play a central role in the classroom (**dependent**), I **firmly disagree with that idea (independent)**.

Your complex sentences do not need to be, and probably should not be, much more complicated than this. Tacking on clause after clause, especially without appropriate punctuation, will cause your sentences to spin out of control and result in a lack of coherence.

Out of Control: An over-reliance on electronic devices in the classroom might cause children to become easily distracted which could cause them to learn less, which could result in lower grades and therefore they lack enjoyment of school.

8) Paraphrasing Appropriately

While using the same words over and over again will keep you stuck in Band 6, to earn Band 7, you must not only vary your language, but do so in a way that does not misinterpret the question, misstate your argument, or involve not-quite-right vocabulary.

For example, consider the following prompt:

Shopping is becoming more and more popular as a leisure activity. However, some people feel that this has both positive and negative effects. Why is shopping so popular? What effects does its increase in popularity have on individuals and on society?

Compare the following sample opening sentences below.

Accurate (Band 7+): In recent years, shopping has become an increasingly popular pastime for many people, bringing benefits as well as detrimental effects.

Note that the version above uses standard, moderately formal English, substituting the equivalent term *pastime* for *leisure activity* and using the equally standard phrase *benefits as well as detrimental effects* to rephrase *positive and negative effects*.

Notice also that the word *effects* is not paraphrased. This is perfectly acceptable; it is not necessary to replace every single word, just to avoid sounding as if you are copying the question because your vocabulary is limited.

Now look at this version:

Inaccurate (Band 6-6.5): Nowadays, shopping is a beloved activity for many youths, but its escalation in acclaim has merits and demerits.

This is another example of typical Band 6 writing. It replaces the moderate, semi-formal language of the question with inappropriately formal synonyms (*escalation in acclaim*) and non-standard vocabulary (*merits* and *demerits*).

In addition:

- The question refers to people in general, not young people, or "youths" (a word employed relatively infrequently by native speakers and wildly overused in IELTS essays). This choice inaccurately narrows the focus of the prompt.
- The writer employs excessively emotional language, replacing the relatively neutral word *popular* with the much more extreme *beloved*. This is a misinterpretation of the question.

9) Answering the Exact Question Asked

To score Band 7 in Writing, it is not sufficient to write a response that is only generally connected to the topic at hand. Rather, you must address the precise question asked and not "reinterpret" it in a way that you happen to prefer.

For example, consider the following [question](#): *The education you receive from your family is more important than the education you receive from school. To what extent do you agree with this statement?*

The focus of the essay must be on how much you agree or disagree with the idea that the education one receives from one's family is more important than the education one receives in school.

You can agree fully; agree partly; or disagree fully.

The focus of your essay cannot be on something else. If you want a high score in Task Analysis, you cannot, for example, focus on your *opinion* about how much influence families vs. schools should have on children's development.

Off-Topic: I believe that it is very important for schools to educate children to reject harmful or old-fashioned ideas they have learned from their families.

10) Making Your Opinion Clear and Consistent

This is related to the previous point but is not precisely the same thing. We're going to continue working with the same question (*The education you receive from your family is more important than the education you receive from school. To what extent do you agree with this statement?*)

To earn a Band 7 score, you must answer the question in a straightforward manner and not try to be overly sophisticated or subtle. The examiner will not penalize you for being too simple. Rather, he or she will reward you for stating an opinion that is clear and easy to follow.

Vague: In my opinion, without the help of knowledge gained from one's family, the goal of education is incomplete.

The above statement has the same general topic as the question, but it does not actually address what is asked.

Clear: I fully agree/disagree that that the education a person receives from their family has a stronger influence than the knowledge they acquire in the classroom.

Throughout the remainder of the essay, you must make sure to only argue in favor of that opinion (which, for the record, may not be what you actually believe).

While you may want to recognize that knowledge gained in school does have an influence on people, at no point should you contradict yourself by suggesting that it is stronger than familial influence.

Note that you must use comparative (*-er/more*) and superlative (*-est/most*) forms correctly to indicate what you believe is more vs. less important, and to avoid making illogical statements.

11) Keeping Paragraphs Focused

A very easy way to lose points in Cohesion and Coherence is to try to cover too many sides of an argument in a single paragraph. To earn a Band 7 score in this category, you must give each paragraph a clear and consistent focus.

As a general rule, 1 paragraph = 1 side of an argument or topic.

For example, if you are writing an “advantages/disadvantages” essay, then one body paragraph should be devoted to advantages and a separate body paragraph should be devoted to disadvantages. You should not try to discuss both in the same paragraph.

Likewise, in a “problems and solutions” essay, you should devote one paragraph to outlining the problems and another to discussing the solutions. (Alternately, you could devote a single paragraph to each problem and its solution, but since successful IELTS essays tend to follow a four-paragraph structure, this is not recommended.)

If you fully agree in a “to what extent?” essay, you can pick two main points that support your argument and devote a paragraph to each one. Alternately, you can devote one paragraph to explaining why the side you are arguing for is correct, and another paragraph to explaining why the other side is incorrect. If you partially agree, you can devote one paragraph to the part of the prompt you disagree with and the other to the part you agree with.

12) Developing Your Argument without Under- or Over-Explaining

To score well in Task Analysis, you must hit the “sweet spot” between jumping from point to point without discussing any idea in depth, and spending so much time discussing a single point that you begin to drift off topic or do not have time or space left over to discuss additional ideas. (The latter is a particular problem if you are asked to discuss *advantages* and *disadvantages* or *reasons*, plural.)

As a general rule, you should [spend about two sentences](#) developing each major point; however, you may need to adjust this depending on the particular question at hand. A prompt that asks you to list both causes and solutions in the space of about 200-225 words (excluding the introduction and conclusion) will require you to discuss each point very briefly before moving on to the next. On the other hand, if you fully agree or disagree with the statement in a “To what extent...?” question, you will likely have considerably more space to cover various aspects of the subject.