

THE CRITICAL READER

IELTS® Writing: Grammar Rules A Short Guide

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1. Standard spacing: full stops/periods, commas, and semicolons are placed **right** after a word, with **one space** before the following word.

Correct: In **reality, money** does not always lead to happiness.

Incorrect: In **reality,money** does not always lead to happiness.

Incorrect: In **reality , money** does not always lead to happiness.

Incorrect: In **reality ,money** does not always lead to happiness.

2. Always capitalize:

- The first word in a sentence
- The pronoun *I*
- Names of specific people, places, and things

Correct: **I've** left a spare key to the house with my brother **Robert**.

Correct: **He's** worked at **Infosys** in **Bangalore** for the last three years.

Do NOT capitalize other nouns, or the first word after a comma/semicolon.

Incorrect: People should make an **Effort** to eat healthy food.

Incorrect: In fact, **Many** people successfully lose weight.

3. Formal vs. Informal

Contractions, e.g., *don't, isn't* = informal; do not use in Task 2 essays

Correct: When people earn a university degree, **they are** more likely to obtain a high-paying job.

Incorrect: When people earn a university degree, **they're** more likely to obtain a high-paying job.

- Phrasal verbs, especially with *get*, are associated with informal writing; single-word verbs are associated with formal writing (e.g., *get up* vs. *awaken*).
- Use abbreviations only when standard in titles (e.g., *Dr. Smith*). Never use **e.g.**, **i.e.**, or **etc.** in Task 2 essays.
- Never use an **ampersand (&)**, slang contractions such as ***gonna/wanna***, or textspeak such as ***u*** instead of ***you***, even in informal Task 1 letters.

4. Definite and Indefinite Articles

A(n) = indefinite, indicates a noun in general or one of many

Often used when a noun is first mentioned.

Correct: Some people argue that living alone or in **a small family** is better than living in **a large family**.

Incorrect: Some people argue that living alone or in **(the) small family** is better than living in **the large family**.

Note that the plural of *an* is no article, e.g., *Some people argue that large families are better than small families*.

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.

Correct: **The current trend** toward solitary living (= specified trend) will likely cause demand for smaller housing units to increase.

Incorrect: **(A) Current trend toward solitary living** will likely cause demand for smaller housing units to increase.

5. Articles with(out) Indefinite Pronouns

Few = almost no (one); *A few* = several

Correct: **Few people** believe that children should be allowed unlimited amounts of junk food. = almost no one believes this

Correct: **A few** researchers have suggested that eating foods low in acid help people lose weight. = several researchers have suggested this

The majority

A number of (=many)

Correct: **The majority/A number** of dieters have difficulty losing weight.

Incorrect: **Majority/Number** of dieters have difficulty losing weight.

6. Focus on correct usage rather than obscure or "high-level" words; when paraphrasing, use synonyms whose meanings you are absolutely certain of.

Correct: I believe that governments should direct more funding toward the arts, as museums, theatres, and concert halls benefit society in many important ways.

Avoid: The most conspicuous reason which reinforces my perception is that arts, theatre, and music aid in the extension of society in a plethora of manners.

7. Linking devices = formulas; do not alter them

Correct: **First(ly)**, e-commerce threatens the health of local businesses.

Incorrect: **At the outset**, e-commerce threatens the health of local businesses.

8. Two sentences must be separated by period/full stop, NOT a comma

Difficulties primarily involve two types of words at the beginning of a clause:

Conjunctive Adverb (e.g., *however, therefore, in fact, moreover*)

Correct: Studying in a foreign country has many **advantages. However,** (or: **advantages, however,**) it also has some drawbacks.

Incorrect: Studying in a foreign country has many **advantages, however,** it also has some drawbacks.

Pronoun as Subject (e.g., *it, they, I*)

Correct: Cigarettes affect smokers' **health. They** (or: **health; they**) also affect the health of bystanders.

Incorrect: Cigarettes affect smokers' **health, they** also affect the health of bystanders.

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*)

Correct: **Although** e-commerce has many benefits, it also poses a threat to many small businesses.

Correct: E-commerce has many benefits, **but** it also poses a threat to many small businesses.

Incorrect: **Although** e-commerce has many benefits, **but** it also poses a threat to many small businesses.

10. Modal verb (e.g., *can*, *should*, *might*) + bare infinitive
(Exception: *ought* + full infinitive)

Correct: Technology **can help** society in many ways.

Incorrect: Technology **can helps** society in many ways.

Incorrect: Technology **can to help** society in many ways.

Incorrect: Technology **can helped** society in many ways.

11. *Request*, *recommend*, and *suggest* + (*that*) + subject + bare infinitive

Correct: The technician suggested (**that**) I **restart** the laptop.

Incorrect: The technician **suggested me to restart** the laptop.

12. Present Perfect: *since* + starting time; *for/over/during* + duration

Correct: Since the 1920s, antibiotics **have played** a crucial role in preventing and curing many common infections.

Incorrect: Since the 1920s, antibiotics **play** a crucial role in preventing and curing many common infections.

Correct: For/Over/During the past century, antibiotics **have played** a crucial role in preventing and curing many common infections.

Incorrect: For/Over/During the past century, antibiotics **play** a crucial role in preventing and curing many common infections.

13. Simple Past vs. Present Perfect vs. Past Perfect

Simple past = finished past action; used with a date or time (e.g., *yesterday, last year*) when an action is complete, even if it occurred very recently.

Correct: I am unable to attend the meeting because I **was** in a car accident this morning.

Incorrect: I am unable to attend the meeting because I **have been** in a car accident this morning.

Past Perfect = finished action that came before a second action

Correct: The shop clerk claimed that the coat **had been cleaned** thoroughly, but when I arrived home, I saw that it was still dirty.

Incorrect: The shop clerk claimed that the coat had been cleaned thoroughly, but when I **had arrived** home, I saw that it was still dirty.

14. *Will* = future; *Would* = hypothetical actions + polite form, used for requests

Correct: I **will read** the report tomorrow morning.

Incorrect: I **would read** the report tomorrow morning.

BUT:

Correct: I **would read** the report tomorrow morning; **however**, I will be in a meeting until 1pm.

Correct: I **would like** to request some information regarding scholarships.

Incorrect: I **will like** to request some information regarding scholarships.

15. *When* or *if* + present-tense verb, not future tense; the future can be used in the following clause

Correct: When I **go** to Canada next year, I will visit Toronto and Montreal.

Incorrect: When I **will go** to Canada next year, I will visit Toronto and Montreal.

16. 3rd-person singular verbs end in -s; 3rd-person plural verbs do NOT end in -s

Correct: Genetic engineering **allows** parents to prevent their children from being born with a serious hereditary disease.

Incorrect: Genetic engineering **allow** parents to prevent their children from being born with a serious hereditary disease.

Correct: Nowadays, many students **take** a gap year between secondary school and university.

Incorrect: Nowadays, many students **takes** a gap year between secondary school and university.

When a verb follows *that* or *who*, it must agree with the noun before *that/who*.

Correct: Genetic engineering is a technology that **allows** parents to prevent their children from being born with a serious hereditary disease.

Incorrect: Genetic engineering is a technology that **allows** parents to prevent their children from being born with a serious hereditary disease.

Know also:

- Gerunds (-ing forms) = singular, e.g., Reading magazines **is** one of my hobbies.
- Indefinite pronouns with *any*, *every*, and *no* = singular, e.g., Everyone **knows** that people must consume fewer calories in order to lose weight.

17. *One* + singular noun; *One of the* + plural noun

Correct: **One effect** of global warming is the disappearance of many plant and animal species.

Correct: **One of the effects** of global warming is the disappearance of many plant and animal species.

Incorrect: **One of the effect** of global warming is the disappearance of many plant and animal species.

18. It and They

Singular noun = it; Plural noun = they

Correct: The iphone is among the world's most popular devices: **it** can be found virtually everywhere on the planet.

Incorrect: The iphone is among the world's most popular devices: **they** can be found virtually everywhere on the planet.

Correct: Fad diets are very popular, but **they** can also be quite dangerous.

Incorrect: Fad diets are very popular, but **it** can also be quite dangerous.

It's = it is; Its = possessive form of it

Correct: The laptop worked perfectly for several hours, but then **its** screen suddenly went blank.

Incorrect: The laptop worked perfectly for several hours, but then **it's (= it is)** screen suddenly went blank.

19. No comma before or after *that*

Correct: Some people **believe that** consumers should make more of an effort to buy from independent shops.

Incorrect: Some people **believe, that/ believe that**, consumers should make more of an effort to buy from independent shops.

20. Indirect questions:

- Use a period/full stop
- Verb follows subject

Correct: It is unclear **why some people are** able to eat an unhealthy diet without gaining weight.

Incorrect: It is unclear **why are some people** able to eat an unhealthy diet without gaining weight?

21. Nouns acting as adjectives are never made plural

Correct: One of my favourite dishes is **lentil soup**. (*Lentil* = adj. modifying *soup*)

Incorrect: One of my favourite dishes is **lentils soup**.

Correct: It is unusual for a **sixteen-year-old student** to know exactly what type of career he or she wants to pursue.

Incorrect: It is unusual for a **sixteen-years-old student** to know exactly what type of career he or she wants to pursue.

22. Comparatives and Superlatives:

- 1-syllable adjectives & 2-syllable adjectives ending in -y: -er/-est
- All other adjectives: *more/most* + adjective

Correct: My new apartment is **larger** than my old one.

Incorrect: My new apartment is **more large** than my old one.

Incorrect: My new apartment is **more larger** than my old one.

23. *Advice, furniture, information, infrastructure, research, staff* = uncountable

- Not used with *a(n)*
- Not made plural

Correct: Whenever I have a problem, I ask my best friend for help because he always gives **good advice**.

Incorrect: Whenever I have a problem, I ask my best friend for help because he always gives **a good advice**.

Correct: In my opinion, governments should devote more money to improving and developing **infrastructure**.

Incorrect: In my opinion, governments should devote more money to improving and developing **infrastructures**.

24. Fewer, many modify countable nouns; less, much modify uncountable nouns

Correct: Today, **many** people prefer to do their shopping online.

Incorrect: Today, **much** people prefer to do their shopping online.

In addition, *much* cannot modify an adjective; use *so* or *very* + *adjective*.

Correct: I was **so happy** to hear that you were coming to visit.

Incorrect: I was **so much happy** to hear that you were coming to visit.

Correct: I was **very happy** to hear that you were coming to visit.

Incorrect: I was **very much happy** to hear that you were coming to visit.

25. Prepositions/Idioms:

I'm looking forward to + -ing form.

Correct: I'm looking forward to **receiving** your response!

Incorrect: I'm looking forward to **receive** your response!

Note that *to* functions as an independent preposition rather than part of an infinitive. As a result, the -ing form can be used.

On + day or next + day, NOT on next + day.

Correct: I'd love to come to the party **next Saturday**, but unfortunately I already have plans.

Incorrect: I'd love to come to the party **on next Saturday**, but unfortunately I already have plans.

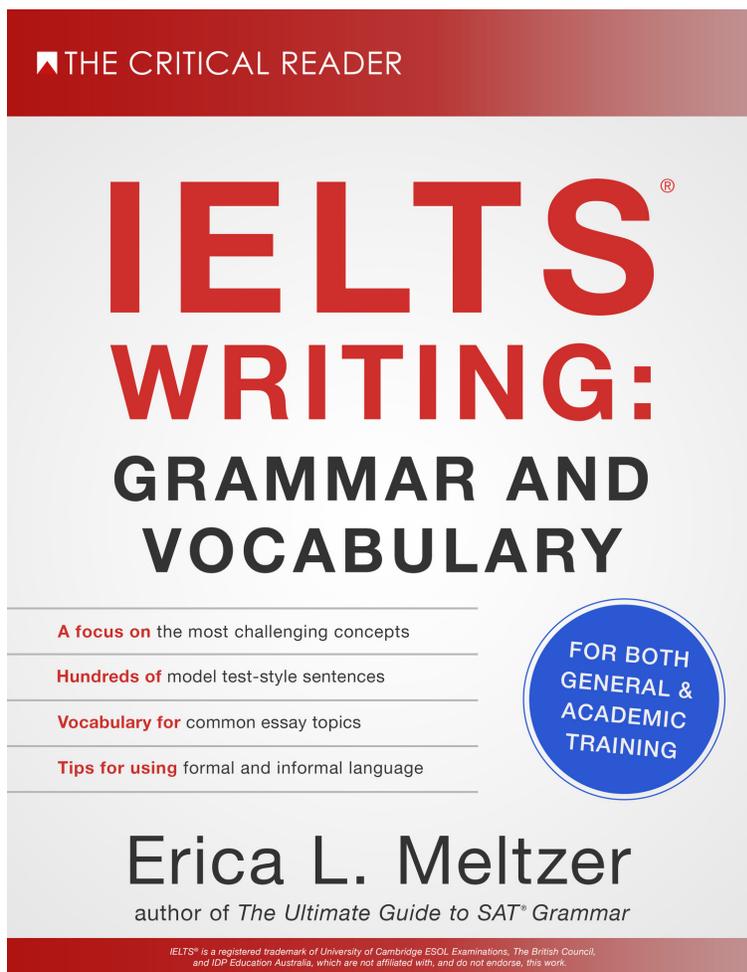
Considered (to be) + noun

Correct: Pelé is **considered (to be)** one of the greatest football players in history.

Incorrect: Pelé is **considered as** one of the greatest football players in history.

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