

IELTS Writing

Preparing for any international English exam can be a stressful and time-consuming experience. But if you’ve gotten this far, congratulations! It takes a lot of hard work to arrive at this level. Now is when the real work begins. Taking an international exam requires discipline and not only a high level of English, but also a strong understanding of test taking strategies and a deep knowledge of the structure of the test. This document will address the structure of the writing section of the IELTS test and also some strategies to help you best tackle the exam.

Test Preparation and Strategies

Overview

The International English Language Testing System, or IELTS, is an international exam written and assessed in the United Kingdom. On the writing section of the exam, test takers will be expected to respond to two individual tasks and convey meaning and understanding while also showing their level of English. The writing section is the penultimate part of the test, taken following the listening and reading sections.

This exam, like most international exams, follows a very strict pattern for each test. The writing section of this test is no different. There are two unique tasks in the writing section which are outlined below, along with some strategies for each individual task and then some overall strategies for the writing section as a whole.

Structure

The writing section of the test is presented in two tasks. Their structure can be seen in the chart below:

Task 1	Task 2
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<p>20 minutes</p> <p>You will be presented with a chart or graph and asked to interpret the data in writing.</p> <p>Minimum 150 words</p>	<p>40 minutes</p> <p>You will be given a prompt to write about, typically discursive in nature.</p> <p>Minimum 250 words</p>
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What follows is a breakdown of both sections of the writing exam and some strategies for each one.

Task 1

1. Take Notes and Draw Conclusions

When first presented with the chart or graph, you should take notes and look for as many data points as possible. Once you have this raw data, begin to look for conclusions between certain metrics and comparisons and contrasts that you can make. Once you know all of these things you will be better equipped to structure and write your essay. Digesting this data first can also help to decide how you would like to structure your paper, allowing you to feel freer with your time.

2. Consider Your Structure

As with all writing, structure is very important to your success. In this section of the test, you must think about presenting your writing in a coherent way. The most advised route of action is to write one or two brief sentences introducing the topic, followed by your analysis in one or two paragraphs, and finally a short conclusion of your findings. There is no golden ticket in this section as regards to structure, but making sure that you know how you are going to write your paper before you start the majority of your writing is vitally important.

3. What Are the Facts?

This section is not looking for an interpretation. It is looking for your ability to understand and digest data or facts. For this reason, you should focus most of your energy on drawing conclusions based on the data in the chart or graph, and worry less about the meaning of them both. You will have access to the chart or graph while you write for the sake of vocabulary and familiarity with the concepts, so use that to your advantage to remain within the realm of facts.

Task 2

1. Make an Argument

The concept of the second task on the IELTS is to have you express an opinion and justify it. For this reason, it is important that you choose one side of an argument and vigorously defend it. Again, as with other sections of the exam, it is not required that you actually believe your argument, but rather that you can find justification and examples that best defend your



statement. While you plan, take some time to consider both sides of the argument try to find three strong justifications. Whichever one you feel most comfortable with is the one that you should defend.

2. Consider Your Structure

Structure of this writing task is especially important. It is highly recommended that you follow the five-paragraph form in presenting your essay. This structure includes an introduction with thesis statement that summarizes your argument and outlines the paper as a whole, three body paragraphs with topic sentences and justification that represent your three arguments, and a concluding paragraph that summarizes your overall thesis. It is by no means required, but is the most widely accepted and used form of presenting a discursive essay.

3. Support, Support, Support

One of the most important parts of your IELTS writing is not only presenting coherent and well thought out arguments, but also defending them with vigor. Think of examples that best defend your point and that can apply in the real world, and tell a personal story (or invent one) if you can to try to demonstrate your argument even more fully. Not only are you expected to use high level language in this section the exam, but the test grader also wants to see your ability to convey ideas and points in English. For this reason, finding as much support as possible is highly recommended.

General strategies

1. Focus on Language

One of the most important aspects of this exam is to focus on your language use and grammatical structures. It is not only important to use higher level structures and language, but also to use a variety of both. Being able to mix in a large number of different tenses along with wide-ranging vocabulary will be a big boost to your score in the end. Drawing conclusions and making a statement is also important in the IELTS test, but your effective use of the English language cannot be more strongly stated.

2. Pen and Paper

Everything on this test is done with pen and paper, there is absolutely nothing digital about it. In this case, it is very important that your writing is legible at all times, because if the test grader cannot read what you wrote after making a good attempt, it will be marked wrong. Proper spelling is a graded part of this test, so it is vital that you write neatly and clearly so that both you and the test grader are able to understand what you have written. Additionally, writing in any language for an hour can cause fatigue, so you should practice writing for extended periods of time so that the physical demands do not become a cause for concern.

3. Implement Key Phrases and Vocabulary

Coming to the test with a few idioms and advanced vocabulary in your back pocket can be very helpful. Phrases and idioms demonstrate a mastery of the language because native speakers use them constantly. But be careful—don't come with a list of 30 phrases and words, and use

Sources:

<http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare-your-test/free-practice-tests/writing-practice-test-1-ielts-academic>



them only if you feel very comfortable. Having a manageable list of five phrases and five vocabulary words is much easier to work with, and incorrectly using a phrase or word can be damaging to your score, so be sure that you know the context of their usage as well.

4. Planning is Paramount

These tests are administered with a time limit, so knowing how to best utilize that short time is very important. Even more important is to take some time and plan your essays. Yes, you're probably thinking 'but 20 or 40 minutes is *no time* to write, I just have to start writing like crazy!'. Yes, you may feel stressed about time, but taking five minutes to plan your essay before you start writing can really help to make the actual process of writing much faster. Once you are able to lay out your concepts, and write a thesis statement and some topic sentences, you will find that the rest is just filling in with justification and language. It will also help you to structure your writing, which is a graded part of this test. Experiment with your planning and it will pay off bigly.

5. Answer the Question

One thing that will certainly lower your score is to not actually answer the question. For instance, if the second writing task asks you to either agree or disagree with a statement, and you spend most of your time summarizing the statement itself, you have not answered the question. Before you begin and while you plan, you should be constantly asking yourself what the question is and how you are going to answer it. In this way, you can be assured that your score will go up.

6. Use Transition and Signal Language

There are many words in English that can help you illustrate the form of your paper. For instance, using words like 'first', 'additionally' and 'finally' can help the reader to see which point you are making seamlessly and easily. Also, using conjunctions and contrasting language can help the reader to understand you're your point explicitly, and can help to really drive your main message home. Study up on this language and know how to effectively use it in context before the test.

7. Study the Rubric

Typically available to you online or in a test preparation book will be the rubrics that test graders use to evaluate your writing. Study this rubric in detail and know what exactly they will be looking for when they grade your paper in order to help you be more informed about your writing. This is the same criteria that will be used to grade you, so studying it can only benefit you in your practice for the exam itself.

8. Practice Makes Permanent

Sources:

<http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare-your-test/free-practice-tests/writing-practice-test-1-ielts-academic>



The notion the “practice makes perfect” is a very flawed one. How you practice is how you will perform on the test. If you practice inconsistently and don’t have a plan, this will reflect in your test score, but if you look at the details and practice your weaknesses, you will certainly be more successful. Coming up with a plan, and seeking out valuable resources will undoubtedly result in a more ideal score and hopefully save you some time and money in the long run.

9. Take a Preparation Course

If there is one thing that is true about most international exams it is that they are not cheap. Oftentimes making an investment in a preparation course can mean the difference between taking the test once or three times, which can be a sound use of your money in the long run. Because these tests follow a specific formula, studying for the test and mastering test taking skills will often lead to a higher score and more positive outcome for the student.

Sources:

<http://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/prepare-your-test/free-practice-tests/writing-practice-test-1-ielts-academic>