



暨南大学
JINAN UNIVERSITY

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暨南大学国际语言考试中心

Center for International Language Testing, Jinan University

IELTS ADVANCED COURSE: WRITING

雅思高级教程

写作

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雅思高级教程一写作

IELTS ADVANCED COURSE: WRITING

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Chapter 1 Overview of IELTS academic writing

The writing part of the IELTS is a one-hour test consisting of two tasks. Task one and task two. Each task is awarded a band score, and the two separate band scores are converted into a final, or overall band score for the writing part.

You are recommended to spend 20 minutes on task one and 40 minutes on task two. However, it is your responsibility to manage your own time. You may, if you wish, attempt task two before task one: they don't have to be completed in chronological order. It is important to bear in mind, however, that task two is worth more marks than task one. For example, if you were awarded a band 6 for task one, and a band 7 for task two, your overall score for the writing would be a band 7. However, if you were awarded a band 7 for task one, and a band 6 for task two, then your overall score would be 6. Therefore, if you spend too much time on task one, thus not allowing yourself time to complete task two adequately, your overall band score may be affected.

You must use a pencil for the writing test. You cannot use a pen. You can use the question paper to make notes if you wish, but Lest papers cannot be taken out of the room. You are not allowed to use a dictionary in the test.

Towards the end of the writing test you are told when you have 30 minutes left. And again when you have 15 minutes left. Therefore, if you do task two first, you can think about beginning task one when you are given the 30-minute warning. This way you will be able to spend the first 40 minutes thinking about your essay, and not how much time you have left.

Section 1 Academic test

Task 1

Task one is to write a report. You are required to describe information from a given set of data. The data are presented as either a chart or table of figures, and you have to write a report for a university lecturer. To leave sufficient time for task two, it is therefore important that you practice writing task one questions in 20 minutes.

Task 2

Task two is to write a 250-word essay on a topic of general interest. However, you should aim for a more academic style of writing in that you should present an argument to evaluate and support your opinions. This may involve comparing and contrasting different points of view. You should adopt a more critical approach than in the General Training test, and aim for a more balanced essay. You are expected to write in a style appropriate for a college lecturer. The essay titles are intended to be of general interest to university students. You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Section 2 The scoring system

You are given a band score for each of the writing tasks on a scale of 1 to 9. Your overall band score for the writing part is then calculated as a percentage of both the scores. Task 2, however, is worth more marks than task one.

Part 1 Band score

- 9 Expert user of written English
- 8 The writing is well-organized with few mistakes and ideas are fully explained.
- 7 The reader can understand the writing. It is well-organised with few mistakes.
- 6 The reader can understand the writing without too much difficulty.
- 5 The writing can be understood but the message is not very clear.
- 4 The reader has difficulty understanding the writing.
- 3 The writing is hard to understand and contains a lot of mistakes.
- 2 The writing shows almost no ability to communicate.
- 1 The writing contains one or two simple sentences.
- 0 The candidate is absent or doesn't answer the question at all.

Part 2 Marking criteria

The marking criteria are:

Task One (20 minutes)	Task Two (40 minutes)
Task fulfillment	Arguments, ideas and evidence
Coherence and cohesion	Communicative quality
Vocabulary and sentence structure	Vocabulary and sentence structure

Section 2 Main problems faced by Chinese candidates

Many people fail to do as well as they are able to do in the writing part of the IELTS test because they don't answer the question in a way they are supposed to.

Part 1 Problems candidates tend to make

Academic	Task 1	Candidates often simply list the data given, and fail to compare the data, looking for trends. They often give opinions, which are not required.
	Task 2	Candidates often fail to answer the question. Instead it is usual for candidates to simply list their opinions in order. Firstly, secondly, thirdly etc. instead of <i>presenting</i> an argument.

Part 2 Differences in writing styles

This may, in part, arise from the differences in writing styles between Chinese and English. In Chinese, it is usual to give evidence to support your opinion, and state your point of view in the conclusion. When writing in English, however, you should present your opinion first in the introduction. Explain your opinion in the main body, by presenting arguments both for and against, and *re-state* your opinion in the conclusion. However, many candidates simply list their ideas without explaining the ideas in detail, or giving the opposite side of the argument. *This makes the essay very simple.* And even if you make very few mistakes, a simple essay cannot get a very high band score because *arguments, ideas and evidence and communicative quality* is poor.

Chapter 2 Features of good writing

Section 1 Writing device features

The quality of a piece of writing is determined by many factors and good writing is substituted by a composition of all these factors. As a result, praise-worthy compositions are all alike; while each weak composition is problematic in its own way. Merely verbalizing the holistic impression one gets from reading some writing product is almost equal to no evaluation at all. Only comments directed at global or local problems are constructive in that the writer can judge himself whether such impression should be taken seriously or not and he can gain some insights into how to revise his work. Therefore, an awareness of the features of good writing goes before the revision stage and lays down the principles for the writer to make necessary changes to drafts.

Look at some examples may be a good way to begin with.

Example (1): I want to introduce my teacher. He is a handsome man in his middle age. Although he wears a pair of thick glasses, he still looks healthy and strong. He is fashionable, too. It is not unusual to see Polo, Pierre Cardin, Playboy or Adidas brand names on him. He is also clever. When he teaches, he does not need to look at the textbook or his lesson plans. However, he is very strict with his students. Most of us are afraid of him and dare not do underhand plays in his class. He is popular among his colleagues. Some say he has a lot of hobbies. And he was the champion breaststroker when he studied at the university. No wonder he is always so optimistic in life!

Example (2): While people speak highly of the Internet, its disadvantages shouldn't be passed. For one thing, to invent the system, a country has to input funds. This separate rich people and poor people. A poor country does not have so much money. A country's future is decided very much on science and technology. For another, with the help of the computer, it is not at all easy to find information. Just like look for a needle in the ocean. Some information is wrong. Some information is bad. And sometimes even the computer will die! What a mess! As a result, the Internet will of course bring disasters to people in future. So, let's say goodbye to the internet now.

Example (3): Now let me tell you how I learned to ride a bike! At first, my cousin stood by my side and helped me to keep the balance. Not long after, he let go the handlebar and ran after me. I rode fast and tried to ride round a corner. Finally, I learned how to get on the bicycle. And it

When some students think of a paragraph or an essay, they tend to hold onto the

idea about length: a paragraph is at least five sentences or an essay is about a page. So they will readily say example (3) is too short and needs improvement. And for the rest they find it much harder to detect the problem. They fail to notice that any well-written piece of writing should be so constructed as to be unified, coherent, fully developed, correct in language use and appropriate with regard to English writing conventions.

Part 1 Unity

Unity means that the entire piece of writing should concern itself with only ONE focus. If it begins with a topic and a main idea, it should not end with another topic or come up with different ideas. Usually unity ranks highest among the criteria in writing assessment. The only possible occasions for the writer to take this principle with a pinch of salt are fiction-writing and report-writing. In fiction, a discourse is often broken into different paragraphs to show that a new speaker is now talking. In journalistic writing, paragraphs are often made short to create 'visual' ease by leaving more white space. Apart from these two occasions, unity should be observed.

As to how to practice unity in writing, the paragraphs below can help illustrate the point.

Progress is gradually being made in the fight against cancer. In the early 1900s, few cancer patients had any hope of long-term survival. But because of advances in medical technology, progress has been made so that currently four in ten cancer patients survive. It has been proven that smoking is a direct cause of lung cancer. However, the battle has not yet been won. Although cures for some forms of cancer have been discovered, other forms of cancer are still increasing.

Progress is gradually being made in the fight against cancer. In the early 1900s, few cancer patients had any hope of long-term survival. In the 1930s, less than one in five cancer victims lived more than five years. In the 1950s, the ratio was one in four, and in the 1960s, it was one in three. Currently, four of ten patients who get cancer this year will be alive five years from now. The gain from one in four to four in ten represents about 69,000 lives saved each year.

(From *Basic English Composition*)

Obviously the second paragraph is unified. Centering on the main idea "progress is usually being made" in the topic sentence, the supporting sentences offer a string of figures such as "few; less than one in five; one in four; one in three; four of ten" to show the increasing survivors of victims over the years

With reference to what is said above, the problem with example (1) in 2.3 falls into the category of unity. Instead of taking a cursory glance at my teacher's appearance, intelligence, performance at workplace, personality and so on, it is more sensible for such a short paragraph around 100 words to do a close-up and focus on only one of the aspects, say, his features.

My teacher's face is rough. His complexion is leathery and wrinkled. There are large pores in his skin that covers his nose and cheeks. His nose, broken twice in his life, makes him look like a boxer who has lost too many fights. His mouth, unless he smiles, looks hard and threatening. His chin is massive and

angular. Shaved or not, my teacher's face is rugged.

(From *Basic English Composition*)

Part 2 Coherence

Coherence means sentences or paragraphs should be presented in a logical sequence. It guarantees fluid writing by keeping the piece of writing well-focused and making the main thread of development easily comprehensible to a reader. Coherence can be achieved through the creation of logical bridges and verbal bridges. The logical bridge relies heavily on the sequence in which the writer has chosen to present his ideas, such as: time, space, order of importance, cause and effect. For example, the following group of jumbled sentences can be rearranged according to its inherent logical sequence.

- 1) She always had to pay the full price for her ride.
- 2) Then she reached the age of sixty and got her senior citizen's card, but when she used it for the first time on the bus, it made her feel very old.
- 3) Mrs. Mathews was very happy when she heard this.
- 4) The bus driver had often seen her traveling on the bus before, and he noticed that she was feeling unhappy, so after she had paid her money, he winked at her and whispered, "Don't forget to give your mother's card back to her when you see her again."
- 5) Women may get the card when they are sixty.
- 6) Senior citizens are permitted to travel cheaply on a bus if they have a special card.
- 7) Mrs. Mathews lived in the country but she went into town once a week to buy food and other things for the house, and she usually went by bus.

The paragraph in chronological order runs like this:

Senior citizens are permitted to travel cheaply on a bus if they have a special card. Women may get the card when they are sixty. Mrs. Mathews lived in the country but she went into town once a week to buy food and other things for the house, and she usually went by bus. She always had to pay the full price for her ride. Then she reached the age of sixty and got her senior citizen's card, but when she used it for the first time on the bus, it made her feel very old. The bus driver had often seen her traveling on the bus before, and he noticed that she was feeling unhappy, so after she had paid her money, he winked at her and whispered, "Don't forget to give your mother's card back to her when you see her again." Mrs. Mathews was very happy when she heard this.

The verbal bridge includes a number of linguistic devices. the smooth flow of ideas in the surface structure can be realized through five means: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. However, for the convenience of giving writing instructions, different kinds of transitional devices may be reclassified into the following three levels: word-level, sentence-level and paragraph-level.

1. Transitional Devices at word level

At the word-level there are mainly six different types of transitional signals.

1) Pro-forms (pronouns, pro-verb, etc.)

I hope you can come. / I hope so.

Jane is in London. / Tim is there, too.

I like coffee. / We do, too.

2) Repetition

Repetition of a key term or phrase should be used alternatively with pronouns and it should be carried out with restraint and discretion. A close examination of the differences between the following paragraphs helps illustrate the point. In the first example, the overuse of the pronoun "it" may confuse readers. In the second, the misleading pronouns are replaced by the noun they refer to in the first example.

English has almost become an international language. Except for Chinese, more people speak it than any other language. Spanish is the official language of more countries in the world, but most countries have it as their official or unofficial second language. More than seventy percent of the world's mail is written in it. In international business, it is used more than any other language, and it is the language of airline pilots and air traffic controllers all over the world. Moreover, although French used to be the language of diplomacy, it has displaced it throughout the world. Therefore, unless you plan to spend your life alone on a desert island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, it is a useful language to know.

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(From *Basic English Composition*)

3) Word groups (synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms,...)

He firmly believes "A cat has nine lives," since his own feline has had several narrow escapes.

He hates chocolate bars but loves chocolate milk.

He concealed the letter under Pride and Prejudice and the school inspector never detected any difference in that book.

4) Ellipsis

Shakespeare's characters are really alive, so are some of Jane Austin's.

We ordered fried potatoes, but they brought us boiled.

By birth he was an American; by profession, a singer; by instinct and training, a rebel.

5) Collocation

Use paired expressions to connect one sentence to another, e.g.

on one hand... on the other hand for one thing ...for another

6) Connecting words (See Appendix 3)

Some students may think connecting words sound repetitive; others may think they are too obvious; still others may think they are too mechanical. In a way, they are right. However, the benefits of transitions far outweigh their negatives. Transitions are like the glue. Although they cannot substitute for good organization, they can help bring out the underlying logic of a piece of writing so that readers can follow along easily. The following paragraphs may serve as a strong example. Apparently the second paragraph reads much smoother owing to the connecting words.

Television was invented by John Logie Baird. When he was young he built an airplane. He tried to fly in it. It crashed down below. Baird was fortunate not to be killed. It did not discourage him. When he was older he tried to make diamonds from coal. There was an enormous explosion. He was not injured. He became a businessman. His business failed. He thought of working at television. His family advised him not to. He did not listen to them. He rented an attic. He bought the apparatus he needed. He started working. He worked for a long time. He was not successful. One day he saw a picture on his screen. He rushed out to get someone he could "televisе". He found an office boy. He took him back to his room. No image of the boy appeared on his screen. The boy, terrified, had put down his head. He put it up again. His picture appeared on the screen. Television had been discovered.

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2. Transitional Devices at sentence level

Naturally enough, there are fewer types of transitional devices at the sentence-level. The commonly used ones are enumeration, transitional sentences and parallel structures.

1) Enumeration

To highlight the connection between ideas enumeration is much preferred in that it can link ideas that are otherwise completely unconnected, and it looks formal and distinctive.

2) Transitional sentences

Rather than relying on transitional signals like "first, second, third" all the time, transitional sentences can be used to link points in a paragraph or paragraphs in an essay.

3) Parallel structures

In the following examples some conspicuous parallel sentences are underlined to show emphasis.

Poverty is staving up all night on cold nights to watch the fire, knowing one spark on the newspaper covering the walls means your sleeping children die in flames. In summer poverty is watching gnats and flies devour your baby's tears when he cries. The screens are torn and you pay so little rent you know they will never be fixed. Poverty means insects in your food, in your nose, in your eyes, and crawling over you when you sleep. Poverty is hoping it never rains because diapers won't dry when it rains and soon you are using newspapers. Poverty is seeing your children forever with running noses. Paper handkerchiefs cost money and all your rags you need for other things. Even more costly are antihistamines. Poverty is cooking without food and cleaning without soap.

(From *A College Course in Advanced Writing*, p. 52)

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us.

Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms — and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce.

Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah — to "undo the heavy burdens ... [and] let the oppressed go free."

(From *Inaugural Address of the President*, by John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961)

3. Transitional Devices at paragraph level

Transitional paragraphs are only appropriate for long essays and they should be kept brief. Usually, a transitional paragraph consists of two parts. The first part summarizes the main idea of its preceding paragraph in the simple past tense or the present perfect tense and the second part foretells the contents of the next paragraph in the simple future tense. Look at the following two examples:

Example (1) Many of us college students foolishly object to taking courses in writing. Our notion that only poets and novelists have, to write is unrealistic. For example, those going into the technical or scientific fields may think that writing is something they seldom have to do. Yet practicing engineers and scientists say they spend half of their time writing memos and reports. Those going into business think their secretaries will do their writing for them. But this attitude shows a naive faith in the

competency of their secretaries and young business people seldom have private secretaries. The truth is: other things being equal, a person in any field who can express ideas clearly is sure to succeed.

As a slight variation, the example of the business students can be put before that of the technical or scientific students, which reads:

Example (2) Many of us college students foolishly object to taking courses in writing. Our notion that only poets and novelists have to write is unrealistic. For example, those going into business think their secretaries will do their writing for them. But this attitude shows a naive faith in the competency of their secretaries and young business people seldom have private secretaries. Those going into the technical or scientific fields may think that writing is something they seldom have to do. Yet practicing engineers and scientists say they spend half of their time writing memos and reports. The truth is: other things being equal, a person in any field who can express ideas clearly is sure to succeed.

Part 3 Adequate development

The topic, introduced by the topic sentence or the thesis statement, should be discussed fully adequately. Although the length of a composition may vary from paragraph to paragraph and from essay to essay depending on the author's purpose, writers should beware of paragraphs that only have two or three sentences. It is certain that such paragraphs are to be fleshed out if they are short.

At times students' compositions are not short. On the contrary, they are adequately long. Yet appearance cannot replace substance, i.e., the content of the essay and the message a writer intends convey. A piece of writing must have a main idea and a few points to develop it. Each point is expected to be fully discussed unless it is self-evident. This is exactly opposite to writing a *précis*, in which a concise account of the points will suffice and details and examples are omitted. A composition without substance like details or example runs the risk of being skin-deep and forgettable. Unfortunately, Chinese students are liable to include generalities in place of specifics.

The following essay written by a student is ridden with repetition, big words, and lazy and thoughtless writing. And such an instance is not rare among students' compositions.

The Importance of Extracurricular Activities

Many people think that college life should be varied and colorful, and extracurricular activities are an important aspect of it. In my opinion, extracurricular activities are very important.

Firstly, as we all know, extracurricular activities can make our college life colorful. Everyday we have to learn our major courses, so we will feel tired and dull. But extracurricular activities will give us a varied and fresh feeling and make our college life colorful. Secondly, taking part in extracurricular activities can broaden our horizons. Because the knowledge from our books is quite