



## STUDY NOTES

## EPISODE 26: General Task Writing

### WRITING TASK 1, GENERAL TRAINING MODULE

The instructions given for **Task 1, General Training Writing** require a **letter** in response to a problem or issue outlined in the test question.

The candidate must address all the **bullet points** listed in the question.

One of the key skills required for this task is the ability to fully respond to all these points.

The letter might be seeking or providing information, complaining about a service, giving directions or relating a series of events.

### What do I have to do?

Writing Task 1, General Training Module requires the test candidate to:

- write a short letter of 150 words minimum in response to information supplied in the test question, taking approximately 20 minutes
- address all bullet points in the question
- select the appropriate tone – semi-formal to formal

### What type of letter might be required?

We can identify several purposes for writing letters:

- **Giving / requesting information**
- **Giving instructions**, including directions
- **Relating an event**
- **Giving good/bad news**
- **Complaining** – a mild or strong complaint
- **Describing**
- **Advising and suggesting**

Some letters can include a few of these purposes at the same time.

On the follow page are some examples of letters with the purposes listed:

### Study Tips

It is necessary in Task 1, General Training Writing, to address all the three bullet points listed in the question.

Develop your skills in organising a letter in response to information supplied in these bullet points, including as much relevant information as possible, using a variety of sentence types, and appropriate vocabulary. Always check your spelling.



Type of Letter	Examples
Giving information	travel plans; arrival details; what to see and do on holidays; contents of a course of study
Requesting information	course information; library hours and borrowers' rights; timetable information; information about classes and subjects, or examinations, how to prepare and what to bring to the test
Giving instructions	how to get to your house; how to use or operate a tool or machine; how to use the public transport system in your home town
Relating an event	an incident or accident; a memorable event; a holiday or excursion; a happy event (a meal with friends, meeting an old friend); a news event
Giving good news	travelling to visit a friend/family; news about a happy event (a wedding, anniversary, school results, graduation); availability of a new service
Giving bad news	having to cancel an appointment; decided to discontinue a course; cannot attend an event (wedding, party, holiday visit); increase in the cost or availability of a service
Complaining	service in a restaurant; public transport service; noise in local area (industrial, building works, neighbours, nightclub, traffic); cost of a course; teacher on a course; content of a course of study; parks and gardens in your local area; places for your children to play
Describing	describing lost property; a friend; a place; a favourite holiday destination; your favourite place; your apartment or house; your family; your teacher; your school; your favourite shop or restaurant
Advising and suggesting	giving advice to a friend on what to study or choosing a career; to parents on dealing with a difficult child; to a friend who is thinking of emigrating; what to see and do on holidays, in a new country or city; what to order in a restaurant; what to do at night for entertainment



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## What does the question look like?

The layout of an IELTS General Training task 1 Writing question is standard. All questions look the same, but of course each question is different – in terms of the topic and the particular purpose of the letter.

### Example: WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

You are visiting another country to visit a family member you have never met before. This relative has offered to meet you at the airport.

Write a letter to this relative informing him/her of your arrival details and how to recognise you. In your letter

- introduce yourself and say why you are writing
- give your arrival details
- describe what you look like, so your relative will recognise you

Write at least 150 words.

You do **NOT** need to write any address.

Begin your letter as follows:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ ,

NB: This letter requires the giving of information (“give your arrival details”) and a description (“describe what you look like”).

To summarise:

- you should spend 20 minutes on the task
- you should address all the information in the task
- you must write at least 150 words
- you do NOT need to write any address



- you should begin with “Dear \_\_\_\_\_,”

## How are letters organised in English?

Letters in English are structured in a particular way. They consist of several parts:

1. The **Greeting**, or salutation
2. The **Body**
3. The **Conclusion** – final words to conclude the letter
4. The **Closing salutation** and personal signature

<b>Greeting</b>	Dear _____,
<b>Body</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. introduce yourself and say why you are writing</li> <li>2. your arrival details</li> <li>3. what you look like, so your relative will recognise you</li> </ol> <p>Final words to close the letter.</p>
<b>Conclusion of the letter</b>	
<b>Closing salutation</b>	Regards (Yours sincerely for a formal letter or Yours faithfully for a business letter) *

\* **NB** “Yours faithfully” is used in British and Australian English. It is not commonly used in North American English, where usually “Yours sincerely”, is used for formal letters.

In IELTS, the contents of the body of the letter are described or dictated by the question. The task tells you why you are writing and what you are writing about:



Why you are writing: "You are visiting another country to visit a family member you have never met before.

This relative

has offered to meet you at the airport.

Write a letter to this relative informing him/her of your arrival details and how to recognise you."

What you are writing about is set out in the three bullet points that follow the reason statement (for instance):

In your letter

- introduce yourself and say why you are writing
- give your arrival details
- describe what you look like, so your relative will recognise you

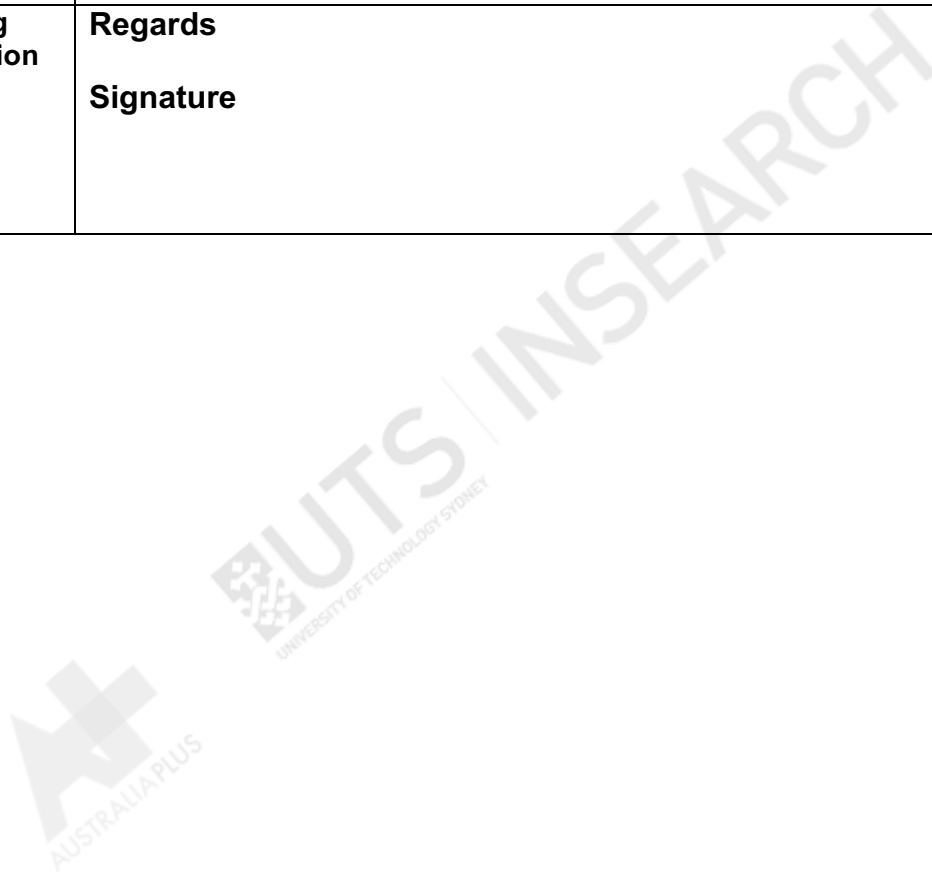
The way the IELTS task question is constructed gives you the structure for your letter.

This tells you that you should construct 3 body paragraphs, one for each bullet point. Thus your letter should look something like this.

<b>Greeting</b> (Dear .....)	
<b>Body</b>	<b>1. Introduce yourself and say why you are writing</b> <b>Purpose stated</b> (I am writing ....)
	<b>2. Give your arrival details</b>



	<b>3. Describe what you look like, so your relative will recognise you</b>
<b>Conclusion of the letter</b>	<b>Final remarks</b>
<b>Closing salutation</b>	<b>Regards</b> <b>Signature</b>





## What language choices do I have?

We write because we have a **purpose**. It is important to indicate at the beginning of a letter what its purpose is – exactly why you are writing:

Type of Letter	Purpose Statement
Giving information	I am writing to advise that ....
Requesting information	I am writing to request information about ....
Giving instructions	I am writing to explain how to ....
Relating an event	I have been asked to give details of the accident ....
Giving good news	I am very happy to tell you that....
Giving bad news	I regret to inform ....
Complaining	I am writing to complain about ....
Describing	I am writing to describe what I remember of the ....
Advising or suggesting	I would like to offer some suggestions about ....

## Functions

### Giving information

#### Structures

It gives me great pleasure to be able to ....  
 I am pleased to be able to ...  
 I am happy to announce ....  
 Please be advised/informed that ....  
 I would like to inform you that ....  
 Here is the information you required/requested/asked for.  
 Attached please find the information you required/requested/asked for.

### Giving good news

#### Structures

I am delighted to be able to advise/tell/inform you that ...  
 I am pleased to advise/tell/inform you that ....  
 It gives me great pleasure to advise/tell/inform you that ...  
 It gives me great pleasure to be able to advise/tell/inform you that ...  
 I have some great/good/happy news to share with/tell you.

### Giving bad news

#### Structures

I am sorry to say that ...  
 I regret to advise/tell/inform you that ....



## Giving a reason

This is due to ....

This is owing to ....

This is because of ....

This is a result of ....







## Requesting information

**Polite**



**Impolite**

**Request:**

I would appreciate it if you could send me information on ...  
It would be appreciated if you could ....  
I would be (most) grateful if you could send me information on...  
Could you please send/forward/supply information on ...  
Would you please send/forward/supply ....  
Would you be so kind as to ....  
Would you mind sending/forwarding/supplying me ....  
Please may I have information on...  
May I have information on ....  
Please send/forward/supply information on ...  
Send/forward/supply information on ...  
Give me information on ...  
I want information on ...

**Being explicit:**

In particular, I need to know ....  
Actually I need information on ....  
The information I require is ...  
What I require/need/want is ....





## Giving instructions

### Grammar

Imperatives:

put, turn, add, close, shut, remove, heat  
don't forget to, don't touch, don't open

Polite



Please remember to clean the ....  
Please arrange to have the iron repaired.  
Please have the car repaired by next Friday.  
Please clean the ....  
I'd like you to clean the ....  
I want you to clean the ...  
Clean the ....

Impolite

Conditionals:

if .... then ....  
unless .... then  
Eg: **If** the iron is broken, **then** please fix it.

Transition Signals:

first, second, third, then, next, after that, final, last  
firstly, secondly, thirdly, finally, lastly

when, while, as

Eg: Turn left **when** you reach the corner.  
**While** beating the eggs, blend in the sugar.  
Maintain speed **as** you turn the corner.

**NB** It is possible to replace an instruction with a polite request for action.

Example: Please repair the iron. It is faulty.  
(Polite **instruction** using an **imperative** verb)

I would like the iron repaired. It is faulty.  
(Polite **request** using a **modal** verb)



## Complaining

**When making a complaint there are sometimes a few parts to the message:**

### Announcing that you have a complaint to make

I am writing to complain about .....

I would like to make a complaint about ....

Unfortunately, there were some problems with ....

### Making a point

I should/would like to remind you that it is illegal to park a car in this place.

I should/would like to point out that it is illegal to smoke in public places.

I would like to draw your attention to the law banning smoking.

I hope it is not necessary to remind you that smoking is illegal in public places.

### Warning

Unless something is done about this, I will be forced to take the matter to ....

Unless you do something about this, I will have to ...

If you do not do something about this, then I will have to ....

## Advising or making suggestions

You should/might ...

Why don't you ...

You might like to ....

Perhaps/maybe you could try ...

Have you thought about ...

What about doing/having/going/trying ....

Why don't you ....

I suggest that you ...

## Apologising

I am extremely sorry that ...

I humbly apologise for the trouble ....\*

I apologise for ....

Please accept my apologies for what happened.

Please pass on my apologies to ....

Give my apologies to ....

I regret that .....

I am sorry that



**\* NB This is a very formal construction**

## Politeness

Modal verbs are used in English for politeness.

May I ....

Would it be possible to come at 8.30 and not 8.00?

Would you mind if I changed the meeting time?

Would you mind turning down your music – I can't study.

Could I/you come at a later more convenient time.

## Levels of Formality

Formality is achieved in English in several ways:

### Vocabulary choices

### Grammar choices

Language can be made more formal either by choosing more formal vocabulary or by choosing more formal grammatical structures.

## Vocabulary

1. Simple or common words are less formal than unusual or less frequently used words. These simple words are usually short, monosyllabic words, whereas more formal words tend to be longer, multi-syllabic words:

Informal	Formal
send	forward
give	provide
stop	refrain from
want	require
happy	grateful
I am sorry	I regret



## 2. Conjunctions

Informal	Formal
because of	owing to / due to / as a result of
and	furthermore, moreover
but	however
if	whether

## 3. Phrasal Verbs

Informal (Phrasal Verb)	Formal (Single Verb)
look into	investigate
think about	consider
look back	reflect
pass on	forward
go out	exit
go in	enter
get off	alight
get on	board

## 4. Modal Verbs

Informal	Formal
I will be very happy if you can ....	I would be very happy if you could....
I want to point out ....	I would like to point out ....
Can you please ....	Could you please ....
If you want ....	If you would like ....
If you need ....	Should you require ....
Why don't you ....	You might like to ....
You should take a train.	It would be better for you to take a train.

## Grammar



## 1. Active/Passive Voice

Informal (Active Voice)	Formal (Passive Voice)
Unless you do something about ....	Unless something is done about ....
If you don't do something about ...	If something is not done about ....
I will have to take ....	I will be forced to take ....
I would appreciate it if ....	It would be appreciated if ....
This caused the fire to break out.	The fire was caused by ....

## 2. Instructions and Polite Requests

Informal (Direct Instruction)	Formal (Indirect Request)
Please clean all the windows.	I would like all the windows cleaned.
Please make a reservation in my name.	I would like a reservation made in my name.

### What is the examiner looking for?

For information on the criteria used by IELTS examiners when marking an essay for Task 1, go to [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

There are four criteria which IELTS examiners refer to:

1. Task Response
2. Coherence and Cohesion
3. Lexical Resource
4. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

### What do these criteria mean?

#### 1. Task Response

This criteria is a measure of your ability to construct a letter which:

1. **addresses fully** all aspects identified in the bullet points listed in the test question, using a minimum of 150 words, in the time allowed (20 minutes is recommended). The content must be **relevant** and **accurate**.
2. is **organised** in a particular way with:
  - i. a **salutation** or greeting (Dear Sir or Madam))
  - ii. a clear **statement of purpose** (reason for writing), and
  - iii. clear **paragraphs** addressing each bullet point, and finally
  - iv. an appropriate **closing** (*Yours faithfully, Yours sincerely, All the best, or Regards*).



3. **adopts an appropriate tone. Level of formality** is achieved in the use of:
- i. **polite phrases**
  - ii. **topic choice** – what we talk about in formal or informal settings
  - iii. more **formal vocabulary**, fewer **phrasal verbs**, and no **slang**
  - iv. **punctuation**

Example: Postcards are punctuated very loosely and contain many abbreviations and slang terms, as well as many phrasal verbs, and maybe some amusing **topics** or anecdotes:

“Paris nightlife is fabulous! Oohlala! Wowee! Can’t wait to show you the happy snaps! Boy! – talk about hot! hot! hot!”.

## 2. Coherence and Cohesion

It is important that your letter is easy to follow – that it is **logically organised**, from sentence to sentence, and from the beginning to the end, from the opening paragraph, to the closing. Information and ideas should be sequenced logically through the letter so that it is easy for the reader, the examiner, to follow.

**Coherence** means **logical organisation of information and ideas** across the whole letter and is achieved through:

- i. clear use of **paragraphs**, from the opening paragraph which clearly states the purpose of the letter, to the closing paragraph. Each paragraph should clearly address a single bullet point.
- ii. **transition signals** and **conjunctions**, **time words** and **phrases**, and **discourse markers**.

**Cohesion** means the **organisation of language at the sentence level**, inside and between sentences. This is achieved through:

- i. correct **word order**
- ii. agreement of **subject and verb** (in number and case);  
**noun**  
**and pronoun** agreement (number, case and gender)
- iii. correct use of **articles** (a/an and the)
- iv. choice and sequence of **tenses**, and
- v. correct use of **conjunctions**

## 3. Lexical Resource



Here the examiner looks at your **vocabulary** and your ability to communicate meaning **precisely** and **accurately**. Do you have the vocabulary to carry out the requirements of the task? Lexical resource means:

- i. extensive vocabulary to enable you to easily write a letter in response to the instructions in the task question. These questions will be on a broad **range of topics**.
- ii. command of word forms. There should be a degree of **flexibility** in your use of language, so that you can move smoothly from adjective/noun constructions to verb/adverb constructions. You should have a command of **word forms** (instructive/instructor/instruction/instruct/instructively etc)
- iii. ability to **paraphrase**
- iv. an understanding of **usage (collocation** – “high building” or “tall building”; “beautiful man” or “handsome man”; “white and black” or “black and white”?)
- v. **spelling**

## 4. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

This criteria includes:

- i. range of **sentence types – simple, compound and complex sentences**. Complex sentences contain a dependent clause introduced by a subordinating conjunction, relative pronoun or participle.
- ii. range of **structures**:
  - **active/passive voice**
  - **cause/effect language** (“*as a result the holiday was ruined*”, “*the fault caused a fuse in the power board and a fire broke out...*”)
  - **reported speech** (“*I was told that ....*”, “*the salesman assured me that ....*”, “*I promise/assure you that unless something is ....*”)
  - **conditionals** (“*if something is not done ....*”)
- iii. **level of error** (number of mistakes)
- iv. **punctuation**