

IELTS ADVANTAGE



WRITING SKILLS

A step-by-step
guide to a high
IELTS writing score

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Introduction

Aim of the book

IELTS Advantage Writing Skills is designed for students who want to achieve a score of 6.5–7.0 or higher in the Writing module of the Academic IELTS exam.

We know that most candidates are aiming to get at least 6.5, either to study at university, to work abroad, for visa purposes or to have proof of a good level of English.

The book aims to take your writing to this level, based on our many years of successfully preparing students for the IELTS exam, and our experience as IELTS Writing examiners. All the exercises in the book have been developed in the classroom, and the material has helped hundreds of IELTS students to achieve high Writing scores. The book is designed so that it can be used either in class with a teacher or as a self-study book as you prepare for the exam on your own.

About the exam

IELTS examiners are looking for four different things, and the book is designed to help you in each of these areas:

- **Vocabulary:** You need to have a good range of academic words and phrases for the main IELTS topics.
- **Grammar:** You need to use accurate grammar and a range of complex structures (for example relative clauses, noun phrases, conditionals).
- **Organization:** You need to write clear, well-organized paragraphs, and an answer which is easy to follow.
- **Ideas and arguments:** You need to make sure you have well-developed ideas, that you answer the question fully and that you give a clear point of view.

The IELTS scoring system

The IELTS exam gives you a score from 1 to 9, in bands of 0.5. A score of 9.0 is native-speaker level, but in fact many native speakers fail to achieve a 9.0, so be realistic!

The Common European Framework of languages categorizes IELTS scores like this:

level	CEF Level	IELTS scores
Upper-Intermediate	B2	5.0/5.5/6.0
Advanced	C1	6.5/7.0
Upper-Advanced	C2	7.5 +

Here is our guide to what you can normally do with these scores. However, be sure to check with the employer or university you are applying to.

5.5–6.0 Entry onto a university Foundation course

6.0–6.5 Entry onto a Bachelor's degree course

6.5–7.0 Entry onto a Master's degree course

+7.0 Normally required to work in English-speaking countries in professions such as medicine, dentistry, law and accounting

Organization of the book

Units 1–6 focus on Task 2, which is the academic essay. We have divided Task 2 into three types:

- Units 1 and 4 look at **advantages and disadvantages essays**. In this type of essay, you have to discuss the positive and negative sides of a topic (for example 'The advantages and disadvantages of working from home') and then express your view.
- Units 2 and 5 look at **problem and solution essays**. You have to explain the causes of a common social problem (for example 'Obesity') and make some suggestions about how to solve it.

- Units 3 and 6 look at **opinion essays**. You have to state your view about a topic (for example 'Should smoking be banned in public places?'), then justify your opinion.

The units build on each other, so when you study opinion essays, for example, we advise you to study Unit 3 first, and then Unit 6.

Each unit is built around two texts: an introductory text, which includes useful grammar, ideas and vocabulary, and a model essay, which guides you as you write.

Units 7–9 focus on Task 1, in which you need to describe graphs, charts or maps.

- Unit 7 shows you how to write about graphs with a **trend** (changes over time).
- Unit 8 looks at how to describe graphs and charts where you have to **compare** data.
- Unit 9 describes how to write about **processes and maps**.

Features of the book

- **Try it first!**: Before you start each unit, you are encouraged to write an answer to the question on the first page. It will help to show up the strong and weak points of your writing, and see what you need to improve.
- **Interesting texts**: The book contains a range of texts in different styles (newspaper articles, interviews, chat-room comments and so on). These aim to make the topics enjoyable and to introduce you to a range of natural and useful vocabulary. They have been specially written for this course to focus on the areas of essay-writing needed in the IELTS exam.
- **IELTS grammar exercises**: Each unit contains grammar exercises which show you how to apply grammar rules to your writing. We have selected the grammar items which we think are the most useful and relevant to the IELTS Writing exam, and show you how to use them in both Task 1 and Task 2.
- **Academic vocabulary for writing**: The vocabulary you need for IELTS Writing is significantly different from general English or the vocabulary used in speaking, so the book contains many exercises which show you how to write using the correct academic style.
- **Collocations and chunks**: The exercises in the book include a range of collocations and chunks – words which commonly go together (for example *have a good work–life balance*), so that you can quickly and easily improve your written academic vocabulary.
- **Model essays/answers**: For each unit, we have written a model answer. These will help you to see what the examiners are looking for, and give you guidance about how to write your answers.
- **Structure and linking**: Many candidates achieve a lower score than they could get in IELTS Writing because their answers are not organized in the correct way. Each unit has exercises to help you organize your writing in the best way possible.
- **Exam skills**: Each unit has exercises which show you how to develop your techniques ready for the exam. We include exercises, for example, on how to write an introduction to an essay and how to build a good paragraph.
- **Sample student answers**: Each unit contains at least one real answer written by an IELTS student. The answers are different levels, so that you can see what is required to achieve a 6.0 or a 7.0, for example. We have given examiner's comments and suggestions at the end of each answer, to help you learn from these answers.
- **Check and challenge**: At the end of each unit, you have the chance to revise the language you have studied, and to extend your language with extra challenges.
- **Practice questions**: At the end of each of the Check and challenge pages, there are one or two extra questions for you to apply what you've learned in the unit.

We hope that you enjoy using this book and wish you every success in the IELTS exam!

Richard Brown and Lewis Richards

Advantages and disadvantages essays 1: Living abroad

Try it first!

Task 2 Writing

How to write an advantages and disadvantages essay

Very often in the IELTS exam, you will have to write an essay called an 'advantages and disadvantages' essay. This is where you have to write about the good and bad points of a common situation.

Here is a typical question:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of leaving your country to live or study abroad?

Try writing an essay on this subject before you study this unit.

You will need to:

- write an introduction to the topic;
- think of two advantages to the situation and provide clear examples;
- think of two disadvantages and write about these with good support;
- write a short conclusion giving your overall opinion;
- write a minimum of 250 words.

Take your time, but remember that in the exam you will need to complete Writing Task 2 in around 40 minutes.

Home or away?

1 Look at these popular sayings about home and discuss the questions below.

Home is where
the heart is.

Home sweet
home

There's no place
like home.

- 1 Do you agree with these sayings?
- 2 Do you have similar expressions in your language?
- 3 Can you think of any others?

2 Complete these everyday questions about living arrangements using the correct form of the verb *live*. Then write a short answer for each one.

- 1 Where are you at the moment?
- 2 How long have you been there?
- 3 Would you rather on your own or with friends or family?
- 4 Are you a good person to with? Why? / Why not?
- 5 Have you ever abroad? If so, how did you find there?
- 6 If you could anywhere in the world, where would it be?

3 Work with a partner and share your answers. Make some notes about their responses. What do you have in common?

Tip
Remember that 25% of your score will be for grammar. Examiners will be looking for two things:
1 a good range of grammar (e.g. lots of tenses, conditionals, modals, etc.)
2 accurate grammar. Make sure your tenses are correct, and you don't make silly mistakes. Be sure to practise your grammar and get your tenses right.

Introductory text

- 1 You are going to read an article entitled *Getting away from it all*. What do you think it is about?
- 2 Now read the article on the opposite page.

Responding to the text

- 3 Complete this table with the positives and negatives of moving away that were mentioned in the article.

good points about moving away	downsides of moving away

- 4 Add some ideas of your own to the table in Exercise 3.

Building your bank of words and phrases

As you work through the book, you will be developing a strong vocabulary in the process. It is really important to show both range and accuracy of vocabulary in the exam.

- 5 Find the words or expressions in the article that have a similar meaning to these definitions.

- 1 clear arrangements (paragraph 1) concrete plans
- 2 had jobs organized (paragraph 1)
- 3 to not hurry (paragraph 1)
- 4 hurried (paragraph 1)
- 5 needed to see new places and have new experiences (paragraph 2)
- 6 give myself extra time to (do something) (paragraph 2)
- 7 damage future work opportunities (paragraph 2)
- 8 exactly the kind of thing I like (paragraph 3)
- 9 organized programme or course (paragraph 3)
- 10 I couldn't believe the moment was real (paragraph 4)
- 11 beginning a new life in a different place (paragraph 5)
- 12 become completely involved in (an experience) (paragraph 5)
- 13 see more of the world (paragraph 6)
- 14 easy or without problems (paragraph 7)
- 15 improve my mood (paragraph 7)
- 16 remain in touch with (paragraph 7)
- 17 full of life (paragraph 8)

- 6 Discuss these questions.

- 1 Which of the words or expressions in Exercise 5 are the most useful for you?
- 2 How do you say the same thing in your own language?
- 3 What will you do to practise using them?

Getting away from it all

- 1 When I graduated from university a few years ago, I didn't really have any concrete plans for the future. A lot of my friends already had jobs lined up and went straight to work, but things weren't so clear-cut for me. After studying hard for three years, I just wanted to take my time before I rushed into making any decisions about my career.
- 2 London is great, but after growing up there, then spending my student years in the capital, I decided that I needed a change of scenery. I started to look into the possibility of taking a gap year and did a bit of research. In my mind, it would be a good way to buy me some time to think things through. And of course, on top of that, I was very excited about the opportunity to have an adventure! I also knew that having a year out wouldn't really harm my job prospects because employers generally look favourably on it.
- 3 One night I was out with some friends and I got talking to a guy called Ian. He told me that he had been living and working out in New York for the past six months on an international exchange programme. He was working for a market-research company in the centre of Manhattan and living with a group of other British people who were also carrying out work placements in the city. It sounded right up my street and just the kind of opportunity I was looking for. I took some contact details from Ian, and within a week I had applied for a position on the scheme. A month or so later, I was called for an interview and the rest, as they say, is history!
- 4 Arriving in New York after all that hard work at university was an unforgettable experience. I'll never forget standing on Fifth Avenue for the first time and looking up at the Empire State Building while yellow taxis raced up and down. I felt like I was in a scene from a movie. I had to pinch myself.
- 5 Even though it was the first time I had spent an extended period of time away from home, the first few months passed by very quickly. Looking back, it was probably down to the fact that there were lots of other British people around. I had a kind of instant social life. I think because we were all a long way from home and starting afresh, we quickly bonded and became good friends. New York has so much to offer, and soon I had started to discover new interests. My friends back in England laughed when I told them about my cocktail-making classes at night school! I love hip-hop music and street art, so it was easy for me to immerse myself in the New York culture.
- 6 Although my work placement wasn't exactly what I had expected, I gained valuable experience and knew that whatever happened, it would look good on my CV. Anyway, my year abroad was more about the chance to broaden my horizons and consider my future options than about the work.
- 7 I can't say everything about my New York adventure was plain sailing. There were times when I really missed my family and friends. If I had a bad day or was just feeling down, I didn't have the same support network of friends that I could go to back at home to cheer me up. Having said that, I was able to keep in contact with everyone fairly regularly via phone or email, so I was never too homesick.
- 8 On the whole, I would describe my year in New York as a life-changing experience and an opportunity that I'm happy to say I made the most of. I got the chance to live in one of the most vibrant and cosmopolitan cities in the world, I became a much more outgoing person and, above all, I made lots of great friends along the way. I certainly don't regret my decision to go.



Spotlight 1

Writing about life changes and experiences

Are you ready to move abroad? Take the test!

Complete the statements below with the correct word from the box, then score yourself on each one from 1 to 5.

adapt cope easily ~~mix~~ open pick sample scratch sense touch

	Yes					No				
1 I find it easy to mix with new people.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2 I can to new situations easily.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3 I'm not worried about losing with old friends.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4 I make friends	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5 I am able to up new languages without much trouble.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6 People say I'm-minded and friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7 When I travel somewhere new, I like to the local food.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8 I feel I can with most challenges that life throws at me.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
9 Starting a new life from doesn't worry me at all.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
10 I have a keen of adventure.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Check your score in the answer key on page 115. Compare with a partner. What were the biggest differences in your answers?

Tip
The fastest way to build a powerful vocabulary is to study how words fit together into chunks of language instead of focusing on individual words. For example, you know the word *decision*. But by exploring texts, you learn the verb + noun collocation *make a decision*. Then you learn other useful chunks, such as:

- *make a decision about* something (a job, a university course)
- *rush into* making a decision about
- *take your time before you* rush into making a decision about

The more chunks of language you can learn, the more flexible your writing will be in the exam. You will develop this habit as you move through this book.

Start by looking back at the text *Getting away from it all* on page 9. Pick out and record some chunks you think are useful.

Vocabulary chunks

Focus on the words you added to the questions in the test.

- 1 Look to the left and right of these words in each statement.
- 2 Can you identify any complete pieces of language?
- 3 Is the chunk of language fixed, or can you change parts of it?

Example: 1 *mix*
mix with new people
mix with different people

Try this process for the other words you added. Record the chunks that you find.



Spotlight 2

Verb patterns

Tip

Verbs in English fit together in different ways. It is very important to learn how they work to improve the accuracy of your writing for the exam.

- 1 Think about / Discuss these questions.
 - Have you or your friends/family lived overseas for a long period of time? What problems did you/they face? Have you/they adapted to the new culture? How?
- 2 Read the text below about culture shock and match these headings (a–c) to the three stages (1–3).

a Trouble in paradise b The road to recovery c The honeymoon period
- 3 Which stage are you or people you know going through at the moment?

A CULTURE SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

Many people **would love** to leave their nine-to-five jobs behind and have a life-changing adventure overseas. They **imagine** lying under palm trees as the sun goes down. However, life overseas is not always easy, and many are not prepared for the shock of living in an alien culture.

STAGE 1:

At first, for those who actually **decide** to move abroad, life is an exciting adventure. With their new-found freedom, they **enjoy** exploring their new surroundings, and life seems like an extended holiday. They **don't mind** sampling the local cuisine and discovering other aspects of the local culture. They can even **afford** to practise their foreign-language skills without fear of making mistakes.

STAGE 2:

In many cases, when people **consider** moving to another country, they often **fail** to realize how different life overseas will be. As time goes by, they experience feelings of frustration when language and cultural misunderstandings become a daily headache. In this stage, many people refuse to accept the differences of their host country and some actually **avoid** spending time with local people in favour of mixing with others from their home country.

STAGE 3:

Gradually, over time, the visitor realizes they must accept the differences and not fight against them. This change in mentality **encourages** them to improve their language skills and slowly they **manage** to do the things we would do without thinking at home such as opening a bank account. This new-found confidence **enables** them to see a side of life which very few tourists are lucky enough to witness.

Culture shock is a real issue. The secret is to **stop** trying to change your host country; you will not succeed. If not, you **risk** losing your dream and having to return to the old life you wanted to leave behind.

- 4 Look at the text again and focus on the verbs in red. Complete this table according to the pattern that follows each verb.

verb + -ing	verb + to infinitive	verb + object + to infinitive
imagine lying	would love to leave	encourages them to improve

- 5 Find and correct the mistakes with verb patterns in these extracts from the text.
 - 1 Many people would love leaving their nine-to-five jobs behind ...
 - 2 They don't mind to sample the local cuisine ...
 - 3 ... slowly they manage doing the things we would do without thinking at home ...
- 6 Complete these sentences with the correct verb pattern and your own ideas.
 - 1 If I had the money, I would consider ...
 - 2 I am planning ...
 - 3 Studying English has enabled ...

Model essay: Advantages and disadvantages

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

These days, more and more people are going to other countries for significant periods of time, either to find a job or to study. There are clearly many benefits to doing this, but people who live abroad can also face some difficulties.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living and working in a foreign country.

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Skim the model essay below to find the main points, then complete this table about moving away.

advantages	examples	disadvantages	examples

Nowadays, taking a year out to live or study abroad is becoming increasingly popular. For many people, especially young adults, the chance to spend an extended period of time overseas is an attractive one. However, there are both pros and cons to deciding to do this. In this essay, I will discuss some of the reasons why moving abroad is so popular and some of the challenges to be overcome.

Let's begin by looking at the advantages of moving away. One of the main positives of heading overseas is that it broadens your horizons. What I mean by this is that you have the chance to meet people from different cultural backgrounds and learn to cope with foreign customs and food. This can make you more rounded as a person.

Secondly, moving abroad can lead to a better quality of life. Take British people for example. Thousands of people from the UK move to Spain and Australia every year. These countries have warmer climates and encourage a better work-life balance. In addition, by

living overseas, you can gain qualifications and language skills, which may improve promotion prospects on your return.

Turning to the other side of the argument, culture shock is a major problem. Many people who take a year out find it hard to cope with the language barrier, the food and general cultural differences. This often leads to homesickness and in some cases a sense of isolation.

Another issue is that it can be difficult to start a new life from scratch. In other words, when you move abroad, you have to make new friends and find your place in the community. This process takes time and can be especially challenging if there is also a language barrier to deal with.

All things considered, starting life in a foreign country is never easy. You need to weigh up the pros of the better lifestyle, weather and so on, and the cons of culture shock and language barrier. Personally, I believe the benefits in terms of personal growth eventually outweigh any negatives.

(344 words)

Structure and linking

Organizing your essay

It is important to organize your essay and introduce ideas to the reader as clearly as possible. The structure of what you write and the language you use to package your ideas must be good.

- 1 Label the essay on page 12 with these notes relating to the structure.**
 - conclusion
 - introduction
 - main body (disadvantages)
 - main body (advantages)
 - the writer's opinion
- 2 What is the writer's opinion about moving abroad? Do you agree?**
- 3 These chunks are used in the essay to organize ideas and help the reader to follow them. Find and correct the mistake in each one.**
 - a Turning to the other hand of the argument, ...
 - b Nowadays, ...
 - c Other issue is that ...
 - d All thinking considered, ...
 - e Secondally, ...
 - f Let's begin by look at ...
- 4 Number the chunks in Exercise 3 in the order they appear in the essay. Which part of the essay did you find them in (introduction, main body or conclusion)? How does each one help the reader?**
- 5 Match each of these chunks to one in Exercise 3 with a similar meaning.**
 - 1 These days, ... **b**
 - 2 Another problem is that ...
 - 3 Having looked at both sides, ...
 - 4 In addition, ...
 - 5 I will start by looking at ...
 - 6 On the other hand, ...

Task

- 7 Look at the other model essays in Units 2–6.**
 - Look at other pieces of language that the writer uses to organize and introduce ideas.
 - Make a note of some examples.
 - Study where, how and why each one is used.
 - Make an effort to learn the pieces of language you like and think will be useful.



Writing introductions

It is very important to make a good start to your essay. Writing a clear introduction gives you confidence in the exam and helps to make a good impression on the examiner. Many IELTS candidates panic because they do not know how to begin their essay. In this section, there is a formula which you can follow to help you respond to any advantages and disadvantages essay question quickly and clearly.

1 Look again at the introduction to the essay from this unit in the table below. It consists of four sentences. Complete the table by matching the correct step from the formula (a–d) to the correct sentence in the introduction (1–4).

- a Add an extra sentence to support the first.
- b Focus on the question in your own words.
- c Tell the reader your plan.
- d Write a general sentence about the topic (living/working abroad).

sentence	formula for introduction (advantages and disadvantages essay)
1 Nowadays, taking a year out to live or study abroad is becoming increasingly popular.	
2 For many people, especially young adults, the chance to spend an extended period of time overseas is an attractive one.	
3 However, there are both pros and cons to deciding to do this.	
4 In this essay, I will discuss some of the reasons why moving abroad is so popular and some of the challenges to be overcome.	

2 Now read this question and a model introduction to it. The four steps in the introduction are in the wrong order. Rewrite it correctly.

These days, people work in more than one job, and often change career several times during their life. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?

In this essay, I will look at both sides and try to draw some conclusions.
Many have at least one change of career at some point in their lives.
Nowadays, it is becoming more and more common for people to take two jobs.
But what are the benefits of this situation, and what are the drawbacks?

3 Write four-sentence introductions for these exam questions.

1 What are the pros and cons for children of watching television?

2 What are the advantages and disadvantages of using CCTV cameras to fight crime?

Tip

Looking carefully at the sample answers at the back of the book is another useful way to expand your vocabulary and improve the accuracy of your grammar. Check your answers, then check for new chunks and structures.

Writing conclusions

At the end of any type of essay in the IELTS exam, you need to write a short conclusion. The important thing to remember is there are no right or wrong conclusions, and the examiner will not make any judgements about your opinions, so write freely and clearly.

1 Look at the conclusion from the model essay on page 12.

All things considered, starting life in a foreign country is never easy. You need to weigh up the pros of the better lifestyle, weather and so on, and the cons of culture shock and language barrier. Personally, I believe the benefits in terms of personal growth eventually outweigh any negatives.

Now read another possible conclusion for the same essay.

In conclusion, there are clearly both positives and negatives to spending an extended period of time overseas. While going abroad can be a great experience and lead to a better lifestyle, for many people there are too many differences to cope with. In my opinion, if you go with the right attitude, moving overseas should be an absolutely unforgettable experience.

A good conclusion generally consists of:

- 1 a general, one-sentence summary
- 2 a focused summary of the main points – avoiding repetition of vocabulary
- 3 something new/your opinion

Look back at the two example conclusions above. Underline and number points 1–3 in both of them.

2 Bearing in mind points 1–3 from Exercise 1, rewrite this conclusion in the correct order.

However, it can also be very difficult to cope with the new culture and language. In my view, having the chance to see life in another country can open up lots of exciting new experiences.

It is important to be happy wherever you are, as the grass is not always greener on the other side.

To sum up, living abroad is a challenging experience with both ups and downs.

3 Look at the three conclusions in Exercises 1 and 2 and complete this table with any useful pieces of language.

introducing a conclusion	expressing opinion	linking devices
All things considered,		

Task

4 Read the essay about the advantages and disadvantages of working from home on page 48, but cover the conclusion. Make notes about the main pros and cons and write a conclusion yourself. Then compare your answer with the original.

When you write, you always need to think about the reader (when you take the IELTS examination, this will be the examiner). That means you need to introduce your ideas clearly.

To do this, you need to practise writing clear topic sentences. Topic sentences help the reader to follow the plan of your essay. They are like signposts for a driver.

1 Unjumble these useful chunks of language for writing clear topic sentences.

a advantage / overseas / of / living / is / another

Another advantage of living overseas is ...

b moving / one / of / disadvantages / home / of / away / the / from / biggest / is

c to / of / the / turning / side / other / argument / the

d is / the / abroad / one / main / of / of / moving / positives

e that / another / be / drawback / is / it / can / major

f by / overseas / let's / advantages / looking / start / the / of / travelling / at

2 Number the chunks from Exercise 1 in the order they would come in your essay.

3 Use the chunks of language from Exercise 1 to write complete topic sentences for this essay.

What are the advantages and disadvantages for children of television?

4 Complete these topic sentences with your own ideas. You will need to decide if they introduce positive or negative ideas.

1 One of the main advantages of having a car is *it is a very convenient way of travelling from A to B.*

2 One of the best things about changing your career is ...

3 On the other hand, living in a large city...

5 Use each of these words to replace another in Exercise 4 to avoid repetition.

1 benefit 2 aspect of 3 positive 4 significant

Grammar workout

6 These IELTS essay topic sentences contain mistakes. Can you correct them?

1 Nowadays, take a year out to live or study abroad is become increasingly popular.

2 Let's begin by look at the advantages of move away.

3 All things considered, start a new life in a foreign country never easy.

Use the model essay in this unit to check your answers.

Task

7 Imagine one of the subjects from Exercise 4 (e.g. changing career / living in a large city) is the topic in the exam.

1 Note down two advantages and two disadvantages to form the main ideas of your essay.

2 Write clear topic sentences for your four main ideas, using useful language studied in this section.

3 Using your outline plan, write the complete essay.

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