

IELTS General Task 1 – Letter Writing

Succeeding at any exam requires positivity, preparation, and practice!

The IELTS General Writing Task 1 measures your ability to communicate about common practical issues. You have 20 minutes to respond to a question prompt, by writing a letter to a person, company, or institution. Your response is worth about 30% of your writing score and is graded separately from the Task 2 essay.

The information below includes test-taking tips, strategies, expressions, sample questions, model letters, and references. It can help you get the highest possible score on the letter-writing section of the IELTS. Use it regularly to keep track of your progress. All the best!

TIPS FOR IELTS GENERAL TASK 1

1. Identify the type of letter you are being asked to write.

- Formal
- Semi-formal
- Informal

Step 2 will help you recognize each type of letter.

2. Identify the purpose of the letter.

TYPE	PURPOSE
Formal	Requesting information from a company
	Applying for a job
	Complaining to a bank, store, airline re:product/service
Semi-formal	Making a recommendation/suggestion
	Complaining to a landlord
	Explaining to a neighbor
Informal	Asking a professor for permission
	Inviting someone you know well
	Thanking a friend
	Apologizing
	Asking for advice

Read lots of sample questions. Decide whether the question requires a formal, semi-formal, or informal response. Steps 1 & 2 will help you choose the right language, style, and tone for your letter.

3. Open and close the letter correctly. Do this based on the type and purpose of the letter.

STYLE	CHARACTERISTICS	OPENING	ENDING
Formal	To someone you have not met, whose name you don't know	Dear Sir/Madam,	Yours faithfully,
Semi-formal	To someone you may or may not have met, whose last name you know	Dear Mr Brown, Dear Ms Stone	Yours sincerely,
Informal	To someone you know well, whose first name you know and use	Dear John, Dear Anita,	Best regards, Warm wishes,

4. Start the letter appropriately.

a. Open a formal and semi-formal letter with a formal sentence and paragraph. Get down to business and say why you are writing. Don't try to be friendly, as you do not know the person you are writing to.

Formal:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to inquire about...

I am writing in connection with...

Semi-formal

Dear Mr Johnson,

I am writing to inform you that...

I am writing to...

b. Open an informal letter with a general, friendly paragraph. Acknowledge your friendship first, before explaining the reason for your letter. In fact, the first paragraph could include just friendly small talk, unrelated to the reason for your writing.

Dear Susan

I hope you and your family are all well! It was so wonderful to spend time with all of

you last month. It felt great to catch up with you and Bob, get to know your children, and have fun together after so long. You have always been dear friends of mine, and always will be.

Anyway, the reason I'm writing is that I have some good news: I am getting married in September...

5. Learn and use standard written phrases.

In English letter writing, we use a number of standard expressions and phrases. These not only save time and effort, but also make it easier for the reader to understand our meaning. You can add on the specific information you wish to communicate to these standard phrases. See the list of Useful Expressions below.

6. Spell commonly used words correctly. Learn and practice the correct spelling of words you are likely to use on the exam. Examples are: "sincerely", "faithfully", "in connection with", "apologize", and so on. This is an easy way to boost your score.

7. Divide your letter into paragraphs.

Usually you need four paragraphs:

- Introduction
- Problem / Situation
- Solution / Action
- Conclusion

Make sure to signal the start of a new paragraph in one of two ways:

Indenting: Do NOT leave a line space between paragraphs. Start writing a little to the right of the left margin.

Skipping a line: Leave a line space between paragraphs. Start writing directly from the left margin.

8. Use clear handwriting. Make sure your writing is neat and legible, so your words can be read easily and do not appear to have spelling mistakes. Get feedback from a teacher on your handwriting. Pay special attention to how you form and connect letters such as a, e, i, u, n, r, and w.

9. Write at least 150 words. Practice writing letters till you know what 150 words feels like and looks like. You will lose marks if you write less. You will not lose marks if you write more.

10. Include all three bulleted points. If you exclude even one of the points given to you in the question prompt, you will get a lower grade. Answer all the points.

In your letter:

- explain the problem
- describe why it disturbs you
- suggest a solution

11. Finish in time.

The IELTS General Task 1 letter is worth about 30% of your writing score, so make sure you complete the whole letter. Though you have to make up a story to explain the situation, keep it simple so you don't run out of time. Make sure to keep 40 minutes to complete the essay in Task 2, which is worth much more in terms of points.

12. Read model letters but don't memorize them. Instead, read the letters to get an idea of the overall flow and to pick up new vocabulary and expressions. Make sure to consult only reliable sources, such as [Good Luck IELTS](#), for model answers.

13. Understand the scoring criteria. Learn how to get a high score by knowing what examiners look for and how they award or deduct points.

IELTS General Task 1 Grading Criteria

	Do everything you are asked to do Give a full developed response Include/cover all the necessary points Write 150 words
Task achievement	
	Coherence: Present ideas logically Use structured paragraphs
Coherence & cohesion	Cohesion: Write so points stick together, make sense, and convey your message Use standard expressions & transition words

	Use a wide range of vocabulary naturally, correctly, and fluently
Lexical resource	Use correct spelling
	Choose the right words (word choice)
	Use the correct form of words, such as verbs, nouns, etc. (word form)
	Use a wide range of grammar structures
Grammar range & accuracy	Include different kinds of sentences – simple, compound, complex
	Use effective punctuation
	Use correct capitalization

14. Practice writing letters regularly and get them checked by an IELTS trainer. Not every English teacher understands the demands of this particular exam, so find someone who has IELTS teaching experience, if possible. Practice writing answers to sample questions every day in order to improve your skills, your speed, your confidence, and your score!

IELTS GENERAL TASK 1: USEFUL EXPRESSIONS FOR LETTER-WRITING

To complete your IELTS letter-writing task within 20 minutes, learn to use and spell common phrases and expressions correctly. Choose the correct level of formality based on your question prompt. By using these phrases, you will save time and effort and earn a higher IELTS score. Most of the expressions below are arranged from formal to semi-formal to informal.

For a full list of phrases and expressions, check [Good Luck IELTS](#).

Apologizing

Please accept my sincere apologies for...

I am very sorry about...

Sorry for...

Asking for help

I'd be grateful if you could...

I would appreciate it if you could...

Could you please...

Asking for information

I am writing to enquire about...

I am writing to find out about...

I would like to know about...

Closing

I look forward to hearing from you,

I look forward to seeing you,

I look forward to meeting you,

Complaining

I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with...

I am writing to express my annoyance with...

I'm not happy with...

Expressing satisfaction

I was delighted to learn that...

I was thrilled to hear that...

I was very glad to hear that...

Expressing concern

I am writing to express my concern about...

I was very sorry to learn that...

I was really sorry to hear that...

Giving bad news

I regret to advise you that...

I regret to inform you that...

I am sorry to tell you that...

Giving good news

I am pleased to advise you that...

I am delighted to inform you that...

I am happy to tell you that...

Giving reasons

This is due to...

This is a result of

... This is because...

Making suggestions

Perhaps it would be useful to...

Perhaps it would be possible to...

It might be helpful to...

Thanking

I am extremely grateful for...

I really appreciate...

Thank you for...