

IELTS GENERAL TRAINING

Band Descriptors Decoded

What examiners actually mark, and what moves you up a band

Ronacker Solutions · LaunchPad Career Toolkit

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1. How your score is built

Reading and Listening are marked objectively — a raw score out of 40 converts to a band. Writing and Speaking are marked by a trained examiner against four criteria, each worth exactly 25%, and each scored as a whole band or half band.

Your final Writing score is not a simple average of the two tasks: Task 2 counts twice as much as Task 1.

Skill	How it is scored
Listening	Raw score out of 40 → band
Reading	Raw score out of 40 → band (marked more strictly for GT)
Writing	Four criteria per task; Task 2 weighted double
Speaking	Four criteria across the whole interview
Overall	Average of the four skills, rounded to the nearest half band

Rounding works in your favour — sometimes

An average of 6.25 rounds up to 6.5; an average of 6.75 rounds up to 7. But 6.1 rounds down to 6. If you need an overall 7, one skill at 6 can be carried by the others — which is why it is usually more efficient to lift your weakest skill by half a band than to push your strongest from 7.5 to 8.

2. Writing — the four criteria

Task Achievement (Task 1) / Task Response (Task 2)

Band	What it looks like
5	Some bullets or parts of the question not addressed; position unclear or absent; may be under length
6	All parts addressed, but some more developed than others; a position is present but not always clear
7	All parts addressed with a clear position throughout; main ideas extended and supported
8	All parts covered sufficiently; a well-developed response with relevant, well-supported ideas

What actually moves you from 6 to 7: covering every bullet or question part to a similar depth, and taking a position that is stated in the introduction and still visible in the conclusion.

Coherence and Cohesion

Band	What it looks like
5	Ideas not always logically ordered; cohesive devices missing, repetitive or wrong; paragraphing inadequate
6	Information arranged coherently; cohesive devices used, but mechanically or with some faults
7	Logical progression throughout; a range of devices used with some flexibility; each paragraph has a clear central topic
8	Cohesion managed so well it attracts no attention; paragraphing entirely appropriate

What actually moves you from 6 to 7: one clear idea per paragraph with a topic sentence, and fewer visible connectors rather than more.

Lexical Resource

Band	What it looks like
5	Limited vocabulary; noticeable errors in word choice and spelling that cause difficulty
6	Adequate range for the task; some errors in word choice, form or spelling, but meaning is clear

Band	What it looks like
7	Sufficient range to be flexible and precise; some less common items and awareness of style; occasional errors
8	Wide range used fluently and precisely; skilful use of uncommon items; only rare slips

Precision beats obscurity

Candidates lose marks reaching for impressive words used slightly wrongly. *Ameliorate the predicament* scores worse than *improve the situation* if the collocation is off. Examiners reward the right word, not the rare one.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Band	What it looks like
5	Limited range; frequent errors; punctuation often faulty; errors cause difficulty for the reader
6	A mix of simple and complex forms; errors present but rarely impede communication
7	A variety of complex structures; frequent error-free sentences; good control of grammar and punctuation
8	A wide range used flexibly; the majority of sentences error-free; only occasional slips

What actually moves you from 6 to 7: “frequent error-free sentences” is the phrase to focus on. That is achieved by writing shorter, controlled complex sentences — not longer ones.

3. Writing — the same idea at three bands

One Task 2 prompt: *Some people think governments should fund vocational training. To what extent do you agree?* Here is the same argument written at three levels.

BAND 6

Firstly, I think government should pay for training. Because many people cannot afford the fees. If they get training, they can get a job and then they will pay tax. Moreover, it is good for the country. There are many young people who are unemployed and they need skills. In conclusion, I agree that government should fund training.

Why it is a 6: the position is clear and the ideas are relevant, but nothing is developed. Sentences are short and simple. *Firstly* and *Moreover* are mechanical. There is a fragment (*Because many people...*).

BAND 7

I strongly agree that governments should fund vocational training, mainly because the cost is a genuine barrier for the people who would benefit most. A young person from a low-income household may have the aptitude for a trade but no way to pay for the qualification, and that talent is simply lost. Where states have subsidised training, the return has usually been positive, since qualified workers earn more and therefore contribute more in tax.

Why it is a 7: the idea is extended with a reason and a consequence. There are relative clauses and subordination. Connectors are present but not mechanical. Vocabulary is precise (*aptitude*, *subsidised*, *barrier*).

BAND 8

The case for public funding rests less on fairness than on arithmetic. A young person with the aptitude for a trade but no means of paying for the qualification represents a loss the state absorbs either way — through unemployment support now, or through forgone tax revenue over a working lifetime. Set against that, the cost of a subsidised apprenticeship is modest, which is why countries that have treated vocational training as infrastructure rather than welfare tend to report both lower youth unemployment and higher productivity.

Why it is an 8: the idea is reframed rather than merely stated. Sentence structures vary in length and shape. There is not a single conventional connector — cohesion runs through reference (*that*, *which* is *why*) and logical order. Vocabulary is used with precision, not decoration.

4. Speaking — the four criteria

Criterion	Band 6	Band 7
Fluency & Coherence	Willing to speak at length, though repetition and hesitation are noticeable	Speaks at length without noticeable effort; hesitation is for content, not for language
Lexical Resource	Enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length; paraphrases with some success	Flexible use of vocabulary; some less common items and idiom, with occasional inaccuracy
Grammatical Range	A mix of simple and complex forms with limited flexibility; errors frequent in complex forms	A range of structures flexibly used; frequent error-free sentences
Pronunciation	Generally understood, though mispronunciation reduces clarity at times	A range of features used with some control; generally easy to understand

The Fluency phrase that matters

Band 7 says hesitation is **content-related rather than language-related**. Pausing because you are thinking about the idea is fine and natural. Pausing because you are searching for the English is what caps you at 6. This is why hesitation phrases help — they keep you talking while you think.

5. Using this to plan your preparation

Work out where your marks are actually going

Most candidates prepare by doing more practice tests. That tells you your score but not why. A better approach is to score one piece of your own writing against all four criteria separately and find the lowest.

1. Take an essay you have written under timed conditions.
2. Score it against each of the four criteria using the tables above.
3. The lowest of the four is your ceiling — that is what to work on.
4. Repeat in two weeks and check whether that criterion has moved.

The most common ceiling by criterion

If your weakest is...	Work on...
Task Response	Planning. Five minutes before writing, covering every part of the question with a clear position.
Coherence & Cohesion	Paragraph structure. One idea per paragraph, topic sentence first, fewer connectors.
Lexical Resource	Topic vocabulary in clusters — education, work, environment, technology, health — not random word lists.
Grammatical Range	Complex sentence drills. Relative clauses, conditionals and subordination, written short and controlled.

Half a band on your weakest skill beats a full band on your strongest

If you need an overall 7 and you are sitting at Listening 8, Reading 7.5, Speaking 7, Writing 5.5, the entire gap is in Writing. More listening practice will not move your overall score at all. Diagnose first, then practise.

Ready to practise properly?

Reading a guide tells you what to do. Marked practice tells you whether you are doing it. The Ronacker LaunchPad gives you full timed IELTS practice with band feedback on every answer — Writing marked against all four criteria, Speaking with a live examiner-style roleplay, and Reading and Listening scored instantly.

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