

IELTS GENERAL TRAINING

Writing Task 1

General Training Letters — registers, structure and a worked Band 8 answer

Ronacker Solutions · LaunchPad Career Toolkit

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1. What you are actually being asked to do

In General Training Writing Task 1 you are given a situation and asked to write a letter responding to it. The prompt always contains **three bullet points**. Those bullets are not suggestions — they are the marking scheme. A letter that covers only two of them cannot score above Band 5 for Task Achievement, no matter how well written it is.

Element	Requirement
Time	20 minutes (Task 2 needs the remaining 40)
Minimum length	150 words — aim for 170–190
Weighting	One third of your Writing band; Task 2 is two thirds
Bullets	All three must be covered, each in reasonable depth
Penalty	Under 150 words is penalised; over-length is not, but costs time

The single most common reason for a low Task 1 score

Not grammar. Not vocabulary. It is treating one bullet point in a single short sentence while writing three paragraphs on another. The examiner is checking whether all three are **developed** — roughly balanced coverage is what you are aiming for.

How Task 1 is marked

Four criteria, each worth 25% of your Task 1 score. Knowing what sits under each one tells you where to spend your effort.

Criterion	What the examiner is looking for
Task Achievement	All three bullets covered and developed; consistent, appropriate tone throughout; clear purpose stated early
Coherence & Cohesion	Logical paragraphing; one idea per paragraph; linking that reads naturally rather than being bolted on
Lexical Resource	Range and precision of vocabulary; correct collocation; spelling
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	A mix of simple and complex structures; control of tense, articles and punctuation

2. Register — getting the tone right

Register is the level of formality. Choosing wrongly, or drifting between levels mid-letter, is penalised under Task Achievement. Decide the register before you write a single word, and then hold it to the last line.

The test is simple: **who is receiving this letter, and do you know their name?**

Recipient	Register	Greeting	Sign-off
An organisation, a manager, a landlord — name unknown	Formal	Dear Sir or Madam,	Yours faithfully,
A named person you deal with professionally, or a neighbour	Semi-formal	Dear Mr Ndlovu,	Yours sincerely,
A friend or family member	Informal	Dear Tendai, / Hi Tendai,	Best wishes, / Take care,

The sign-off rule candidates get wrong most often

Yours faithfully goes with *Dear Sir or Madam*. **Yours sincerely** goes with a named recipient. Mixing them — *Dear Sir or Madam ... Yours sincerely* — is a visible error to an examiner and takes seconds to avoid.

What changes between registers

Register is not only the greeting. It runs through contractions, phrasal verbs, sentence length and how directly you make your request.

Feature	Formal	Informal
Contractions	I am writing ...	I'm writing ...
Phrasal verbs	I wish to postpone the meeting	I want to put the meeting off
Requests	I would be grateful if you could ...	Could you ...?
Openers	I am writing to enquire about ...	Just a quick note to say ...
Exclamation marks	Never	Sparingly — one at most

Semi-formal is the safe middle

If a prompt genuinely leaves the relationship ambiguous — a neighbour, a colleague you know slightly — write semi-formal. It is polite enough not to offend and warm enough not to read as cold. Avoid contractions and you will not be marked down.

3. The structure that fits every letter

Use the same five-part skeleton every time. It removes the thinking from the structure so your 20 minutes goes into the content instead.

1. **Greeting.** One line, matched to register.
2. **Purpose.** One or two sentences stating why you are writing. Do this immediately — examiners look for the purpose in the opening lines.
3. **Body paragraph per bullet.** Three paragraphs, one bullet each, three to four sentences apiece.
4. **Closing line.** States what you expect to happen next.
5. **Sign-off and name.** Matched to register.

Opening formulas by purpose

Purpose	Formal opening	Informal opening
Complaint	I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with ...	I need to tell you about a problem with ...
Request	I am writing to request ...	I was hoping you could help me with ...
Enquiry	I am writing to enquire about ...	I wanted to ask you about ...
Apology	I am writing to apologise for ...	I'm so sorry about ...
Invitation	I would like to invite you to ...	I'd love it if you could come to ...
Resignation	I am writing to give notice of my resignation from ...	—

Closing lines

- **Formal, expecting action:** I look forward to receiving your response at your earliest convenience.
- **Formal, expecting a decision:** I would appreciate your consideration of this matter.
- **Semi-formal:** Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.
- **Informal:** Let me know what you think — hope to see you soon.

Do not memorise a full template letter

Examiners are trained to spot pre-learned language that does not fit the prompt. Memorised *openings* and *closings* are fine and expected. A memorised middle section is not — it is treated as language you did not produce, and it drags Task Achievement down.

4. A worked example at Band 8

The prompt

TASK

You recently stayed at a hotel and were not satisfied with the service you received. Write a letter to the hotel manager. In your letter:

- *give details of your stay*
- *explain what went wrong*
- *say what you would like the manager to do*

Write at least 150 words.

Reading the prompt before writing

- **Recipient:** the hotel manager, name not given → formal.
- **Purpose:** a complaint → firm but courteous; never abusive.
- **Bullet 1** is factual: dates, room, booking reference.
- **Bullet 2** carries the detail: what failed and what effect it had.
- **Bullet 3** must name a specific remedy — vague dissatisfaction scores badly.

The answer (186 words)

BAND 8 MODEL

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with the service I received during a recent stay at your hotel, and to request that the matter be addressed.

I stayed in room 412 for three nights, from 14 to 17 July, under booking reference HG-88214. I had selected your hotel specifically because it was advertised as a quiet property suitable for business travellers.

Unfortunately, the stay fell well short of that description. Refurbishment work was being carried out on the floor directly above mine, and drilling began shortly after seven each morning. When I raised this at reception on the first day, I was assured that the noise would stop by midday, but it continued until late afternoon on all three days. As a result, I was unable to prepare properly for the meetings I had travelled to attend.

Given that the disruption was ongoing and known to your staff, I would be grateful if you would refund the cost of the three nights in full.

I look forward to receiving your response.

*Yours faithfully,
R. Mazorodze*

Why this reaches Band 8

Criterion	Evidence in the answer
Task Achievement	All three bullets developed to a similar depth; purpose stated in line one; formal tone held from greeting to sign-off; the remedy requested is specific
Coherence & Cohesion	One bullet per paragraph; time sequence carries the narrative; <i>Unfortunately</i> , <i>As a result</i> and <i>Given that</i> link ideas without feeling mechanical
Lexical Resource	Precise collocation — <i>express my dissatisfaction</i> , <i>refurbishment work</i> , <i>fell well short</i> , <i>ongoing disruption</i>
Grammatical Range	Passive (<i>was being carried out</i>), reported speech (<i>I was assured that</i>), conditional politeness (<i>I would be grateful if</i>), varied sentence length

5. Do's and don'ts

DO	DON'T
• Spend two minutes planning — one line of notes per bullet • State your purpose in the first sentence • Write one paragraph per bullet point • Invent specific details: dates, reference numbers, names • Keep the same register from greeting to sign-off • Leave a blank line between paragraphs • Ask for something concrete in a complaint letter • Leave three minutes to check tenses, articles and plurals	• Do not count every word — learn what 180 words looks like in your handwriting • Do not write a full address block; it is not required and wastes time • Do not use <i>To Whom It May Concern</i> — IELTS expects <i>Dear Sir or Madam</i> • Do not mix <i>Dear Sir or Madam</i> with <i>Yours sincerely</i> • Do not use contractions in a formal letter • Do not open with <i>How are you?</i> in a formal letter • Do not use slang, emojis or exclamation marks in formal writing • Do not run over 20 minutes — Task 2 is worth twice as much

The 20-minute breakdown

Minutes	What you are doing
0–2	Identify recipient and register. Note one idea per bullet.
2–16	Write. Do not stop to edit — keep moving.
16–19	Check: tenses, articles, plurals, spelling, sign-off match.
19–20	Confirm all three bullets are covered. Move to Task 2.

Final checklist

- Have I covered all three bullets, and roughly evenly?
- Is my purpose clear in the opening two lines?
- Does my sign-off match my greeting?
- Is the register consistent, with no contractions in a formal letter?
- Am I over 150 words?
- Have I checked articles (a / an / the) and plural endings?

Practise this way

Write one letter every second day under a strict 20-minute timer, rotating through complaint, request, apology, invitation and information. Five letter types, three registers — once you have written each combination twice, very little on test day will be unfamiliar.

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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