

IELTS GENERAL TRAINING

Writing Task 2

The five essay types, planning method and a worked Band 8 answer

Ronacker Solutions · LaunchPad Career Toolkit

Edition 1.0 · August 2026

1. Why Task 2 decides your Writing band

Task 2 is worth **two thirds** of your Writing score. If you are short of time, protect Task 2 — a weak letter with a strong essay outscores the reverse every time. The question is the same for General Training and Academic candidates, so any Task 2 material you find will apply to you.

Element	Requirement
Time	40 minutes
Minimum length	250 words — aim for 270–300
Weighting	Two thirds of your Writing band
Paragraphs	Four or five: introduction, two or three body, conclusion
Penalty	Under 250 words is penalised; off-topic essays cap at Band 5

Answer the question that was asked

The most expensive mistake in Task 2 is writing a good essay about the general topic rather than the specific question. If the prompt asks whether the *advantages outweigh the disadvantages*, listing advantages and disadvantages without ever weighing them does not answer it — and Task Response is capped no matter how fluent the English is.

2. The five question types

Every Task 2 prompt is one of five types. Identifying the type in the first thirty seconds tells you your structure, so the planning becomes mechanical and your thinking goes into the ideas.

Type 1 — Opinion (agree or disagree)

Signalled by: *To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

- Take a clear position in the introduction and hold it to the end.
- Two body paragraphs supporting your position; optionally one acknowledging the other side before rebutting it.
- A partial position is fine — *largely agree* — but it must still be a position, not a shrug.

Type 2 — Discussion (both views)

Signalled by: *Discuss both views and give your own opinion.*

- One body paragraph per view, given roughly equal weight.
- Your own opinion is **compulsory** — omitting it caps Task Response.
- State your opinion in the introduction and again in the conclusion.

Type 3 — Advantages and disadvantages

Signalled by: *Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?* or *Discuss the advantages and disadvantages.*

- Read carefully — *outweigh* demands a verdict; *discuss* does not.
- One paragraph for each side.
- If asked to weigh them, say plainly which side wins and why.

Type 4 — Problem and solution

Signalled by: *What problems does this cause and what measures could be taken?*

- One paragraph on causes or problems, one on solutions.
- Match them — each solution should address a problem you actually raised.
- Watch for *causes* versus *problems*: they are different questions.

Type 5 — Two-part question

Two direct questions, for example: *Why is this happening? Is it a positive or negative development?*

- One body paragraph per question. Both must be answered.
- This is the type most often half-answered — candidates address the first question well and forget the second entirely.

Underline the instruction words before you plan

Outweigh, discuss both, to what extent, and give your own opinion, what measures. Ten seconds spent here is the difference between Band 6 and Band 7 on Task Response.

3. Structure and the 40-minute plan

The four-paragraph skeleton

1. **Introduction (2–3 sentences).** Paraphrase the topic, then state your position or outline what the essay will cover.
2. **Body paragraph 1.** Topic sentence, explanation, example, link back to the question.
3. **Body paragraph 2.** Same shape, different idea.
4. **Conclusion (2 sentences).** Restate your position in fresh words. No new ideas, no new examples.

Building a body paragraph

Use the same four moves every time. Two well-developed ideas beat five undeveloped ones — depth is what Coherence and Cohesion rewards.

Move	What it does	Example opener
Topic sentence	States the paragraph's single idea	The most compelling argument in favour is ...
Explanation	Says why that idea holds	This is because ... / The reason for this is that ...
Example	Grounds it concretely	For instance, ... / A clear illustration of this is ...
Link	Ties it back to the question	Consequently, ... / This suggests that ...

Invented examples are allowed

IELTS is a language test, not a research paper. A specific invented example (*a study in Zimbabwe found...*) scores better than a vague true one. Nobody fact-checks you. Specific always beats general.

The 40-minute breakdown

Minutes	What you are doing
0–2	Identify the question type. Underline the instruction words.
2–7	Plan: your position, two body ideas, one example each.
7–35	Write. Do not stop to edit.
35–40	Check tenses, articles, plurals, spelling. Count paragraphs.

Five minutes of planning feels expensive when the clock is running. It is the single highest-return thing you can do — an unplanned essay drifts, repeats itself and runs out of ideas at paragraph three.

4. A worked example at Band 8

The prompt

TASK

Some people believe that young people should be required to do a period of unpaid community work before they begin paid employment. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Write at least 250 words.

Thirty seconds of analysis

- **Type:** opinion — *to what extent do you agree or disagree.*
- **Position:** largely agree, with one reservation. Held throughout.
- **Idea 1:** it builds employability skills that classrooms do not.
- **Idea 2:** it exposes young people to social realities beyond their own.
- **Reservation:** compulsion is unfair if it delays earning for those who must support families.

The answer (288 words)

BAND 8 MODEL

It is sometimes proposed that school leavers should complete a mandatory period of voluntary service before entering the workforce. I largely support this idea, although I believe it must be implemented with some flexibility.

The strongest argument in favour concerns employability. Formal education tends to reward individual performance under controlled conditions, whereas community work demands coordination, negotiation and improvisation — precisely the capabilities employers report as scarce among new graduates. A young person who has spent six months organising a feeding scheme has managed budgets, resolved disputes and worked to deadlines that mattered to somebody. No classroom assignment replicates that pressure.

A second benefit is social. Many young people move from school to university to employment without meaningful contact with communities unlike their own. Placing them in clinics, shelters or rural schools makes inequality concrete rather than abstract, and there is evidence that adults who volunteer in youth remain civically engaged decades later. A society whose professionals have seen its poorest conditions first-hand is likely to govern itself more humanely.

The obvious objection is fairness. For a graduate whose family depends on their income, an unpaid year is not a formative experience but a genuine hardship, and a scheme that is affordable only to the comfortable would widen the very gap it hopes to close. This is a serious concern, though not a fatal one: a modest stipend and the option to serve part-time while working would remove most of the difficulty.

In conclusion, I agree that a period of community service should be expected of young people, provided it is designed so that participation does not depend on family wealth.

5. Why that answer reaches Band 8

Criterion	Evidence in the answer
Task Response	Clear position stated in the introduction, sustained throughout and restated in the conclusion; the counter-argument is raised and answered rather than merely mentioned
Coherence & Cohesion	One idea per paragraph; topic sentences signal each turn; <i>whereas, though not a fatal one, In conclusion</i> carry the argument without a visible list of connectors
Lexical Resource	Topic-precise vocabulary — <i>employability, civically engaged, stipend, formative</i> ; no repetition of the prompt's wording
Grammatical Range	Passive (<i>It is sometimes proposed</i>), relative clauses (<i>a scheme that is affordable only to...</i>), conditional (<i>provided it is designed so that...</i>)

Do's and don'ts

DO	DON'T
- Identify the question type before writing anything - State your position in the introduction - Develop two ideas fully rather than four thinly - Use specific examples, invented if necessary - Paraphrase the prompt — never copy it word for word - Write four or five clear paragraphs with blank lines between - Leave five minutes to check grammar	- Do not sit on the fence when asked for an opinion - Do not use <i>Firstly, Secondly, Finally</i> as your only cohesion - Do not introduce a new idea in the conclusion - Do not memorise whole essays — examiners are trained to spot them - Do not use contractions, slang or <i>etc.</i> - Do not write one long unbroken block of text - Do not exceed 320 words — more errors, no extra marks

Connectors that are costing you marks

These appear in almost every Band 5 and 6 script. They are not wrong, but their overuse signals a limited range. Vary them.

Overused	Try instead
Firstly / Secondly / Finally	The most compelling argument is... / A further consideration is... / The remaining issue concerns...
In my opinion	I would argue that... / To my mind... / It seems to me that...
Nowadays	In recent decades... / Increasingly...

Overused	Try instead
Moreover / Furthermore (repeatedly)	What is more... / Beyond this... / Equally important...
In a nutshell	In conclusion... / On balance...

How to practise

Write one full essay a week under a strict 40-minute timer, cycling through all five question types. Between essays, do five-minute plans only — read a prompt, identify the type, write your position and two body ideas, stop. Ten plans a week trains the skill that actually fails on test day.

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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