The AREA method for IELTS Writing and Speaking

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One-page cheat sheet · Answer, Reason, Example, Answer again — essays and Speaking Part 3

> **Weak paragraph = a claim, then straight into a story — or a claim and a reason with nothing to show it. AREA closes the gap: the same four steps on paper (Task 2 body paragraphs) and out loud (Speaking Part 3).**

The four steps

Letter	What it does	Question it answers
Answer	The main point, tied directly to the question	What do you think?
Reason	Explains why it is true — the mechanism, not the same idea in other words	Why?
Example	One specific, believable case that shows the reason	What does it look like in real life?
Answer again / **A**lternative	Writing: back to the question — the point is proved. Speech: often a short nod to the other side.	So what?

AREA is a teaching scheme, not an exam requirement. The examiner marks whether the idea is **developed**, the sentences **connect** and the answer **addresses the question** — AREA is the shortest route to all three.

Writing: Task 2 body paragraphs 1 and 2 — one idea per paragraph

Q: University education should be free for all students. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

A: The strongest argument for free university education is that it gives talented students from poor families the same chance as everyone else. **R:** When tuition fees are high, many capable young people do not apply at all, not because they lack ability but because they are afraid of years of debt. **E:** For instance, a school-leaver from a village may be the best mathematician in her class, yet a loan of several thousand dollars can make a degree look like an impossible risk to her family. **A:** Removing fees would therefore allow universities to choose students by their ability rather than by their parents' income.

Four sentences, about 90 words — exactly the Task 2 body paragraph length.

Mistakes AREA fixes in writing

Mistake	✗ What it looks like	✓ Fix
Example instead of a reason	A claim, then a story about a friend — just an anecdote	Add the Reason: without it the example proves nothing
Reason with no example	Sounds right but stays abstract	Show the examiner you developed the idea
A “general” example	For example, many people… — another generalisation	One person, one place, one situation
Invented statistic	A made-up percentage	A believable situation is safer — nobody can check facts in the exam
On the topic, off the point	A sentence about universities that does not support the paragraph's point	Check each sentence against the paragraph's point, not the essay's topic (costs Coherence and Cohesion)

Speaking Part 3 — full AREA, last A = Alternative

Q: Should university education be free?

A: I think it should, at least for students who can't afford it. **R:** Otherwise a lot of clever young people simply don't apply, because the idea of a big loan scares their families. **E:** I know a guy from my school who was brilliant at physics, but he went straight to work because his parents couldn't take that risk. **Alt:** Of course, someone has to pay for it, so maybe it should depend on the family's income rather than being free for everyone.

- Yes-or-no answer = direct road to 6.0. Expected: 4–6 sentences of reasoning.
- Examiner asks “Why?” / “Can you give an example?” → your answer was too short.
- The caveat shows what earns a high band in Part 3: seeing both sides.
- A personal example is fine if it illustrates the general idea, not replaces it.

Parts 1 and 2

Part 1 — short ARE (2–3 sentences): full AREA becomes a monologue; Part 1 needs a conversation.

Do you like cooking? — Yes, quite a lot. **(A)** It helps me switch off after work. **(R)** Last weekend I tried making plov for the first time, and it actually turned out well. **(E)**

Part 2 — the cue card points do the work. AREA helps at most in the last sentence: why it mattered.

How to practise

- Learn it on paper first: there you can mark each sentence and see the gap (no example, a reason repeating the answer, a drifting sentence).
- **1. Name the roles** in someone else's paragraph: A, R, E or A.
- **2. Find the odd one out** — often on the topic but off the point.
- **3. Every few days, write your own** for a Task 2 question.
- **4. Speaking:** one Part 3 question a day — in writing, then out loud without looking. After a couple of weeks the scheme kicks in on its own.

Paragraph checklist

- ☐ Sentence 1 answers the question directly
- ☐ The reason explains why — not the answer reworded
- ☐ One specific, believable example — no invented numbers
- ☐ Last sentence returns to the point (speech: a caveat)

Full essay plan, timing and linking words: see the Writing Task 2 and Linking words cheat sheets.