IELTS Writing Task 2: the band 7 essay

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One-page cheat sheet · question types, structure, timing, style, checking

> **An IELTS essay is a strict genre, not free composition. Keep to the scheme and you get 6.5–7.0 without rare words. Task 2 = two thirds of the Writing band → give it 40 minutes.**

Five question types — first minute: underline what is asked and how many parts

Type	How to recognise it	What the answer must contain
Agree or disagree	To what extent do you agree…	Clear position from paragraph 1 + arguments for it. Partly agree → say with what. "only / all / always" = invitation to argue.
Two views	Some people think… others believe… Discuss both + your opinion	A paragraph for each view, fairly; your opinion in the introduction and again in the conclusion.
Advantages / disadvantages	Do the advantages outweigh…? / What are…?	Both. "Outweigh" → a yes or no and why.
Problem and solution	Problems (or causes) + what can be done	Specific problems/causes and solutions linked to them — not consequences instead of causes.
Two direct questions	e.g. Why is this happening? Positive or negative?	An answer to both, usually a paragraph each.

Four paragraphs, always · aim 280–320 words

Paragraph	Words	What goes in it
Introduction	~40–50	Question in your own words + position/plan. No "in the modern world", no history, no rhetorical questions.
Body 1	~90–100	Topic sentence · 2 sentences why · 1 specific example.
Body 2	~90–100	Same scheme, second idea/view. Opens with a contrasting link.
Conclusion	~40–50	Restate position, weigh the sides. No new ideas.

Under 250 = automatic penalty. Two developed arguments beat five merely named.

Timing: 40 minutes

- **0–4 min — plan, not text.** Underline the question, decide position, two ideas + a specific example for each.
- **4–33 min — write from the plan.** At minute 20: is body 1 finished, with an example? If not, insert it now.
- **33–40 min — check** in three passes, 1.5–2 min each.
- No plan after 3 min → take a simpler position. Clarity is marked, not originality.

Body paragraph = idea → explanation → example

- **Topic sentence:** one idea, stated directly.
- **Explanation:** why is this so? what follows?
- **Example:** a country, city, case, known phenomenon. "Many people think" is not one.

Practise it as **AREA** (Answer, Reason, Example, Answer again) — see the AREA cheat sheet.

Model: "Universities — only job skills, or broad education? Discuss both views + opinion"

Introduction (restate + position)

Some people argue that universities should concentrate on the skills employers need, while others believe that higher education should cover a broad range of subjects regardless of their practical value. **This essay discusses both views and argues that a combination of the two serves students best.**

Conclusion (restate + weigh, nothing new)

In conclusion, while practical training gives graduates an immediate advantage, a broad education protects them over a whole career. In my view, universities should build degrees around a professional core but require students to take courses outside their field.

Linking words: 6–8 per essay, max one per sentence

`Contrast` However · On the other hand · Although X, Y · Nevertheless
`Consequence` Consequently · As a result · …, which means that
`Others' view` Proponents of X argue that · It is often claimed that
`Own view` In my view · I believe that · On balance

As a result, not "the". *Meanwhile* = at the same time, not "whereas". Full rules: Linking words cheat sheet.

Formal style

✗ Conversational	✓ Formal
kids, stuff, a lot of, huge	children, materials, many, considerable
I think · But/And/Also, at the start	In my view · However/Moreover/In addition
don't, can't · get better, go up	do not, cannot · improve, increase
you (the reader) · always, everyone	people, one · tend to, is likely to

Check in three passes

- **1. Spelling — your own list** of 10–15 words (government, believe, their/there). No spellchecker.
- **2. Articles and small grammar:** article on every singular countable; *demand for*; fewer/less; passive with 3rd form; no comma between subject and verb.
- **3. Fragments and register:** a sentence starting with Which/And/But/Because → attach it with a comma. Finite verb in every sentence? No new idea in the conclusion?

✗ And as a result less risk for them. → ✓ As a result, they face a lower risk.

Typical mistakes

- Wrong question: own view instead of two; consequences instead of causes
- No position in the intro, or it changes by the end; under 250 words
- Ideas listed, not developed; no specific example; both views in one paragraph
- New idea or meta-conclusion ("In this essay we discussed…")
- a cars, this skills, less cars; real-word typos: carer/career, cases/causes