

IELTS TEACHER SERIES

THE KEY TO IELTS WRITING

A writing course for Task 2



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BANDS 7, 8, 9

SECTION ONE

DEVELOPING TASK 2 WRITING SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

How will this course help?

This course teaches the skills needed to write a formal discursive essay that will meet the criteria of the IELTS writing test. The course is divided into two sections. The first teaches the skills needed to write a clear, logical argument, and the second section features guided test practice with model answers. Rather than simply presenting these as a finished product, I will take you through the writing process step by step, and show the type of thinking and planning you need to do in the test. I have also included samples of bands 6 and 6.5 writing that candidates have sent to me over the years. I will help you identify the main problems at this level, show you how to address them, and how to increase the band score from 6.5 to band 8.

Why focus on band 7?

A band 7 certificate is an important qualification that can open doors towards immigration and university study. With the right resources, and after working hard to develop the appropriate skills, many candidates manage to attain this level in every other skill except writing, where the vast majority remain stuck at band 6.5, no matter how hard they try. Understandably, when these people first contact me, their most common feelings about IELTS writing are confusion, frustration, and anger. I hope this course will put an end to these feelings. In writing it, I had one clear aim: to help candidates make genuine progress in writing so that they can get the band 7+ score they need, and finally leave IELTS behind.

Problems and solutions

We cannot solve a problem unless we first try to understand what causes it. When I began working on this project, I had been helping people reach band 7 and above in the writing test for 8 years, and I thought I knew what was causing so many candidates to be stuck at band 6.5. However, as I looked deeper into the problem, I gradually refined my approach and what began as a book, evolved into a course that was double the size that I originally planned on writing. I realised that it is not enough to tell people what to do in an abstract way – we have to show it, step by step. I was also very aware that a great deal of writing feedback focuses on language problems, and it is very easy for grammar and vocabulary to dominate, yet many educated native speakers also struggle to reach band 7 in writing. This shows that the Task response and Cohesion and coherence criteria deserve greater attention, and these are a major focus in this course.

Why is writing so difficult?

When speaking, we can keep talking until the person listening understands what we are saying; if they are confused by an explanation, we can simply repeat or rephrase it. In the speaking test, the examiner can help out by asking a new question, but in writing, there is no one else to keep us going, or to keep us on topic. The truth is that all of us struggle when it comes to writing about complex ideas, even in our first language.

People also tend to see writing as the physical act of putting pen to paper or typing on a keyboard, yet a large part of the writing process is mental. When I am writing a book or preparing a talk, a surprising amount of the work is done away from my desk. I may look as though I am taking a break, walking the dog, or staring into the distance, but inside my head, I am actually 'writing'. This invisible stage of the writing process is a crucial one. It is a time when I can reject ideas, organise my thoughts, and identify my main points, but the fact that we cannot see it means it is often ignored. In fact, many videos give the impression that it's possible to reach a level where you can simply sit down at a desk and write fluently and coherently.

The reality is that all good writing involves thinking, planning, cutting, and rewriting. What you are reading here is the 5th or 6th draft of these materials. It may surprise you to know that my first rough drafts are often far too long, with ideas that are often repetitive and unclear – all common problems at bands 6 and 6.5. Any attempts you make to simply sit and write will also result in first-draft, band 6 writing.

Sample answers and Model answers

I am often asked for sample answers, and many seem to believe these will provide a quick fix to their writing problems, but I have mixed feelings about answers like this. While I can see merit in providing them, I have always been concerned that they encourage people to learn answers to use in the test. I am also worried about providing just one answer when there are multiple possible ways to approach any task. This is why it is important to see the answers supplied in textbooks as a 'sample' rather than a 'model'. The distinction is an important one: a 'model' sets a standard that students can learn from, while a sample answer often does not.

Sample answers produced by professional writers also tend to result in a level of English that goes beyond the scope of the test, a level I think of as the 'invisible band 10.' These answers are written in the comfort of the writer's home, perhaps in several drafts. If an answer is too long, the writer has time to edit and cut. Before publication, the finished product may also be checked and edited by more professionals, all of which can result in a rather nuanced and subtle response to the task that is closer to a reading passage. Understandably, this process does not produce the same results as an individual candidate writing in a timed test situation. Because of this, in my view, the test book sample answers often don't serve as useful models for candidates or for the classroom. Furthermore, although there are many sample answers online that claim to be band 9, the majority of those I have seen actually show band 6 skills in some criteria. Looking at typical sample answers made me realise that the answers provided as a solution are causing a great deal of the current problems, and that while there are 'sample answers,' good 'model answers' are scarce.

How is this course different?

To address these problems, I set out to produce model answers that set the right standard for the test. These models have been produced using a 40-minute time limit so that they reflect what a band 9 candidate can realistically produce in IELTS. It was a revelation to me that I had to change the way I normally plan in order to achieve band 9 Task response and Coherence and cohesion within the time limit. Whether working on a computer or on paper, without the right planning, my efforts were problematic in terms of these criteria. The truth is that teachers and professional writers seldom practise what we preach. As a result, we don't always appreciate the problems associated with successfully completing the task in exam conditions, and so our advice may not always be practical or effective. This is something I have tried to address throughout this course. The same advice applies whether you are taking the computer or paper version of the test.

A note for native speakers

Native speakers of English also take the IELTS test, sometimes as part of a visa or job application, or perhaps to help in their teaching. Many are disappointed to find that they can score band 9 in almost every paper except writing, where they often receive a score of band 6.5. Some see this as proof that the test is flawed, and even conclude that it is subjective. However, seeing the test this way means that they fail to address the problems in their writing that keep them below band 7.

In many English-speaking countries, discursive essay writing skills are generally not taught at a high level within a standard high-school curriculum. In an exam-driven education system, such skills are often only taught in courses where they will be assessed – if something isn't going to be tested then teachers are not motivated to spend valuable time on it in their lessons. Furthermore, while native speakers practise listening and speaking on a daily basis, the same cannot be said of reading and writing. Thus, in tests of written skills, band 9 does not automatically mean 'native-speaker level,' and a native speaker is just as capable of receiving a lower band in IELTS as a non-native speaker.

Speaking is as different to writing as walking is to dancing. While we walk on a daily basis, we dance far less often; while some enjoy dancing, others avoid it as much as possible. Like dancing, writing is connected to style, and your every-day dancing style is more likely to resemble a relaxed shuffle than a classical waltz. Thus, even if you are writing every day, for example, at work, it is unlikely that the style of writing you are doing is the same as that required to present a formal written argument. As with ballroom dancing, there are steps involved in this style of writing that need to be learned and practised until they become natural to you, and this course will show you how to perform those steps.

How to use this course

To improve your score, you must learn to apply the skills the examiner is looking for in your writing. Lessons 1 – 10 will help with this, so be sure to complete this section first, before moving on to the guided test practice section. Don't rush through the lessons – read, re-read, think, absorb, then practise. Work at your own pace. Practising little and often is generally the best approach to take, and I've included ideas to help with this.

Throughout the lessons, you will be encouraged to review your writing. If you have done previous essays, have copies of these nearby. Reflect on your own writing problems and try to be systematic in the way that you work on fixing these. On my website, you will find a link to printable worksheets to guide you through any activities and help you organise your own notes. Print these out and have them next to you as you work through the lessons.

All of our language skills are linked in some way, and I have tried to make use of this by incorporating listening exercises as well as writing ones. These add variety, but I hope you will also find that they have a positive effect on your writing. During the thinking stage of writing, we hear our inner voice. Lower levels tend to think of ideas in their own language and then attempt to translate these word for word. At the higher levels, students can think in the language they will use to write, but it is more than likely that your inner voice makes the same mistakes as when you are speaking in English, and these mistakes will be reflected in your writing. The listening exercises not only offer variety but should also help improve your written accuracy.

NOTE:

The writing models in this course are in response to the writing task 2 questions in the *Cambridge IELTS 9* test practice book, as well as extra test questions I have written. In addition to my own model answers, there are some essays submitted to me by candidates who were continually scoring band 6.5 in writing, shared here with their permission. I will guide you through the problems in these essays and show you how to fix them to produce essays at band 8+.

To ensure that the scores in this course are accurate, it was edited by two wonderful colleagues with extensive experience in IELTS assessment and IELTS test writing, Sophie Walker and Megan Yucel. Their feedback and comments have been invaluable, and I am indebted to them both. The course contains answers to the General Training questions as well as Academic. Look out for separate workbooks for GT Task 1 and Academic Task 1, which I plan to produce in 2021.

LESSON 1

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU NEED TO SHOW?

1.1 Task Response and Coherence and cohesion

The most common problems in sample answers found online are connected to Task response and Coherence and cohesion, and many of those that claim to be band 9 actually show band 6 in these areas. This might suggest that these criteria are simply poorly understood, but a closer investigation reveals a more complex issue.

The 4 criteria used to assess your answer tell us what the examiner is looking for in your writing. It is these criteria that make the test as objective as possible; they should be seen as 'rules' that you must not try to bend or break. According to the band descriptors for Task response, the key problems at band 6 are:

- *Not addressing all parts of the task equally (addresses all parts of the task though some parts may be more fully covered than others)*
- *Not making your position clear (position is clear throughout from band 7) and conclusions clear (the conclusions may be unclear or repetitive)*
- *Not developing and explaining your main ideas (some may be inadequately developed or unclear)*

In Coherence and cohesion, a comparison of bands 6 and 7 shows that the main problems are:

- *Arranging the information coherently (band 6), but without a clear progression throughout (band 7)*
- *Cohesion and referencing (band 6 cohesion within and between sentences may be faulty and referencing is not used clearly)*
- *A lack of a clear central topic in each paragraph (this is present from band 7 onwards)*

Understanding the task

Writing task 2 is a formal discursive essay, in which you must '*present a fully developed position*' in response to the issue raised in the question (band 9 Task response). This means clearly explaining your own thoughts and ideas about the issue, and organising them so that they present a clear argument.

The word 'argument' has a very particular meaning here. In the context of a discursive essay, it means: the reasons you believe something to be true. In IELTS, your argument will explain the reasons why you hold the position you claim to hold. This may mean:

Explaining the reasons why you agree or disagree with an idea

Explaining the reasons why you believe the advantages of something outweigh the disadvantages

Explaining the reasons why something is a problem and what you believe could be a good solution

Explaining the reasons why you believe that certain effects make a development positive or negative

Explaining why you believe a proposed solution is, or is not, the best or only way to deal with a problem

The words in bold show the elements that are often left undeveloped, or that remain unclear in a typical band 6 essay. As we will see in later lessons, candidates below band 7 often attempt to explain their reasons, but these explanations are not always clearly connected to the position they claim to hold, or not always relevant to the issue in the question.

Why Planning and Critical thinking are important for IELTS

In my view, the issues related to Task response are due to a lack of thinking and planning. I suspect that some people believe that once your language level is high enough, you no longer need to plan, or barely need to plan at all. The reality is that humans don't think in clear, coherent paragraphs or arguments. Our thoughts are not always logical, and they don't always connect logically together. This is why no one can simply sit down and write a clear, coherent discursive essay; you must always engage in critical thinking* to sort through your ideas, and plan out your argument first. Without doing this, the writing you produce will be confusing and unclear to your reader, no matter what your spoken language level is.

**Vocabulary note: The word 'critical' often has a negative meaning – it can mean finding faults or problems in something. 'Critical thinking' is not a negative idea, it is about evaluating and judging ideas, it is not about finding errors.*

'I don't have time to plan like that.'

In the test, thinking and planning are often done quickly in order to begin writing as soon as possible. If you do this, although you may gather *some* evidence, you will miss out a very important step: without evaluating this evidence, you cannot see which ideas should be left out, where more explanation is needed, or how to use these ideas to construct an argument. When candidates plan quickly, they tend to present 'evidence' that does not support their argument, or they present an argument with little or no evidence at all. In other words, they produce a band 6 answer, where *'conclusions remain unclear'* and *'some ideas are inadequately developed.'* If you believe that you cannot afford to spend more time planning, then you need to be sure you can afford to keep retaking the test.

Key idea: If you don't apply critical thinking to writing task 2, you will not achieve band 7. If you believe that you cannot afford to spend more time thinking and planning, then you need to be sure you can afford to keep retaking the test.

Development and Progression

The Task response criterion tells us that, to score band 6, a candidate's essay must *'present a relevant position,'* although there might be some *'inadequately developed'* or *'unclear'* main ideas. To reach band 7, candidates' answers must *'present a clear position throughout'*, and for bands 8 and 9, a *'well-developed'* or *'fully developed'* response must be produced. In terms of Coherence and cohesion, to score band 6, there must be *'a clear overall sense of progression'* that is missing in band 5. But to reach bands 7 or above, this progression must be *'clear throughout'* your essay.

These ideas of progression and development are connected to your argument. Progression refers to the way that your argument progresses from one main idea to the next; it can be seen through the way that you organise and connect your individual ideas to create one complete (or fully developed) argument. A common problem I see is a good Introduction and first body paragraph, then a confusing or problematic second body paragraph, and a very brief conclusion. The overall effect of these elements is judged in Task response.

The Coherence and cohesion criterion is used to assess how clearly the different elements of your essay are connected and organised. If you fail to clearly show the connections between your ideas, then you are unlikely to reach above band 6 in Task response or Coherence and cohesion. The criteria make this very clear, yet, when I point out such problems in people's essays, they often resist my advice. Their comments and reasoning may help show why these problems are so difficult to address.

'It is impossible for anyone to begin to learn that which he thinks he already knows.' Ancient Greek philosopher, Epictetus

1.2 How and why you may be practising band 6 Coherence and cohesion

'But I know that a paragraph can have an implied or inferred main idea'

This response shows that some people aim to write in a way that forces the reader (your examiner) to infer their main ideas rather than stating them clearly and directly. If you are writing in this way, then you are not meeting the criteria that the examiner will use to assess your level. Any time there is a lack of a clear central idea in your paragraphs, you are practising staying at band 6 for Coherence and cohesion.

'I want to produce writing like the academic reading passages.'

Some people aim to produce writing at the same level as the Academic reading passages. However, these are not discursive essays – the aim and the style of writing is different to that which you must produce in writing task 2. In a reading test, the passages are chosen because they are good resources for assessing high level reading skills, such as understanding inference. Look at this paragraph from a section 3 reading passage in *Cambridge IELTS 9* (p25).

You might wonder how we can tell whether fossil animals lived on land or in water, especially if only fragments are found. Sometimes it's obvious. Ichthyosaurs were reptilian contemporaries of the dinosaurs, with fins and streamlined bodies. The fossils look like dolphins and they surely lived like dolphins, in the water. With turtles, it is a little less obvious.

Now read the following version. What do you notice?

*You might wonder how we can tell whether fossil animals lived on land or in water, especially if only fragments are found. Sometimes it's obvious. **For example**, Ichthyosaurs, **which** were reptilian contemporaries of the dinosaurs, **had** fins and streamlined bodies. **Their** fossils look like dolphins and they surely lived like dolphins, in the water. **However**, with turtles, it is a little less obvious.*

In the second version, I added cohesive devices that make it much easier for the reader to follow the main idea. These were not deleted by the test writers to increase the reading difficulty – it is a stylistic feature of the original article and represents a common style of writing.

Using authentic passages like this is a large part of what makes the IELTS reading test valid. However, while this form of clear signposting reduces the difficulty of a reading passage, it does not reduce the level of the writing – the second version is still band 9. When we are testing reading, we are assessing your ability to understand complex texts, not modelling the type of writing you should produce in a discursive essay. If you are copying this style of writing, rather than showing your ability to connect your ideas, you are setting a reading test for the examiner.

'But aren't words like 'Firstly, secondly, in addition' just unnecessary fillers or clichés?'

When I have suggested ways to connect ideas more clearly, some people have replied, 'Sure, but isn't it a bit of a cliché to use words like 'the latter' or 'Firstly' etc?' Again, this resistance to do what is needed to improve coherence and cohesion may help to explain why this problem is so persistent. The answer is, no, it is not a cliché to clearly show how your ideas are connected. In fact, many of the academics I follow on Twitter, who supervise PhD students and edit journals, often bemoan the fact that so many of the academic papers they see lack the signposting needed to make the connections between ideas clearer, so the problems this causes go beyond the IELTS test.

The belief that words and phrases like this should be avoided may come from following bad advice. I was recently sent an image of a list of words and phrases that a website had declared were 'unnecessary language fillers.' The list is a confusing mix of phrases that should indeed be avoided, because they are either inaccurate or too informal (*From my perception; in recent days, I guess*), while other phrases on the list are useful cohesive devices: *First of all; Nowadays; On the one hand; Some people believe*. This is a very good reminder that you must always look for reliable sources of information.

Key idea: The language that you learn forms an essential toolkit for your writing. Deciding that some of these tools should be avoided is like a master builder declaring, 'I'd never use a hammer to hit a nail, everyone does that, it's such a cliché.' A master builder would always use the right tool for the job. In IELTS, you must do the same to show that you have mastered the skill of writing.

1.3 Under-use of cohesive devices.

As we have seen, when native speakers write, they do not always use conjunctions and adverbial linking words and phrases to clearly indicate how ideas are connected. This link must sometimes be inferred by the reader. The previous two sentences demonstrate this idea:

When native speakers write, they do not always use conjunctions and adverbial linking words and phrases to clearly indicate how ideas are connected. This link must sometimes be inferred by the reader.

In these sentences, the reader has to understand a connection that is not made explicit through a linking phrase. Nevertheless, there *is* clear cohesion here through the use of referencing and meaning; the first two words of the second sentence, 'This link,' refer back to 'how ideas are connected,' making a separate connecting phrase unnecessary. However, using one will not lower the score; it simply makes the connection clearer:

*When native speakers write, they do not always use conjunctions and adverbial linking words and phrases to clearly indicate how ideas are connected. **As a result**, this link must sometimes be inferred by the reader.*

Adding a connecting word or phrase like this can be especially helpful when more complex ideas are being explained; they act as clear signposts helping the reader to follow the progress of your argument over several sentences or paragraphs. We can only omit such words and phrases when two sentences are very clearly linked in other ways: through their meaning or referencing. The following example, from a sample essay found online, shows the cohesion problem when this is not the case:


People are working longer hours than ever before. In addition, they have more job pressures. People willingly place themselves under these unfavourable conditions. The workforce is a competitive domain.

The first two sentences in this extract are clearly connected, but the last two sentences are not – there is no cohesion and so we cannot infer the link between these ideas. In the Coherence and cohesion band descriptors, this problem is referred to in band 7 (*uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately, although there may be some under-use*). However, it is important to note that this is a negative point – it is not something you should aim for in order to score band 7. The same problem is also linked to band 6 Task response, because these ideas are not developed; the writer does not explain why these ideas are relevant or how they are connected, and there is no evidence given to support them. Consequently, they remain unclear and do not help to develop an argument.

Why do native speakers sometimes leave out connecting words and phrases?

Native speakers do not omit these words and phrases because they are 'unnecessary language fillers'. They may sometimes omit them to avoid repetition, or to reduce the number of words on the page, which is often necessary when writing a long document with a strict word limit. Remember, *skilled* writers are able to link their ideas together in other ways: through referencing, using synonyms, and providing contextual clues. However, with some examples, it is also possible that the writer has left out useful connecting words and phrases because they have not been taught how to use them effectively.

Key idea: If you omit clear signposting words and phrases, you are forcing the examiner to work harder to follow your argument and ideas. This is not something you should aim for if you are preparing for IELTS writing, where the ability to show clear coherence and cohesion is being assessed. Don't set a reading test for the examiner. Rather than boosting your score, this is likely to result in band 6 Coherence and cohesion.

Extra practice 

Look back through one or two previous essays you have written. Read the body paragraphs and circle each connecting word or phrase.

- Are there more than 2 sentences in a row without any connector such as *however*, *because*, *furthermore*, *as a result*, *in addition* etc.?
- Do you think you are under-using them? If not, how did you make the connection between your ideas clear?
- Read your writing aloud to help you see whether you *overuse* any specific connecting words and phrases (i.e. use them repeatedly).

LESSON 2

A ONE-SENTENCE ARGUMENT

2.1 One conclusion or many conclusions?

A typical essay consists of an introduction followed by several body paragraphs and a conclusion. This type of conclusion summarises your overall argument and position thus 'concluding,' or finishing, your essay. However, the body of your essay will contain a different type of conclusion.

An argument is defined as a reason (or set of reasons) given in support of an idea or position. This definition helps to understand something rather confusing: your essay should present an overall argument, which is itself made up of several shorter arguments. Each of these shorter arguments must be clearly explained, organised, and linked together, to create one whole. These arguments form the 'main ideas' in your essay. If any of them are unclear, then you cannot present clear progression, or a clear position, **throughout** your essay.

The shorter arguments, or main ideas, that make up the body paragraphs of your essay should consist of a conclusion and your reason for believing it. It is this type of conclusion that is referred to in the Task response criterion ('*the conclusions may become unclear*' – band 6). These conclusions are often the first and last sentences in a paragraph, but it is important to understand that you are presenting this type of conclusion every time you make a point, or give your point of view. To avoid confusion, in later lessons, I will mainly refer to these as points or main ideas, but first we'll explore how they function as arguments and conclusions.

Key idea: An argument is a statement provided as evidence to show that another statement, the conclusion, is true. The main ideas or points in your body paragraphs should present this type of argument.

A one-sentence argument

Although your main ideas will generally be explained over several sentences within a paragraph, we'll begin by looking at a simple one-sentence argument:

Fruit contains vitamin C, which helps keep us healthy, so the government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit.

To demonstrate that this is an argument, we can separate it into a conclusion and the reasons given for believing it:

Conclusion: The government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit.

Reason 1) fruit contains vitamin C

Reason 2) vitamin C helps to keep us healthy

Points to notice:

- 1) The conclusion does not always come after the reasons. This means that we can also write:

The government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit because it contains vitamin C, which is good for the health.

Even though the order has changed, the conclusion remains the same: the government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit.

- 2) Each reason in this argument is called a 'premise,' which means a claim being made by the writer. The writer is asking the reader to accept that these claims (that fruit contains vitamin C, and vitamin C helps keep us healthy) are true, and that they are good enough reasons to conclude that the government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit. When you are writing, you need to make sure that your claims are true (or at least believable), and that they show the reader that your conclusions are reasonable.

- 3) You are giving your position every time you make an argument like this one. This means that you do not need to write *I believe; I think; In my view* (etc.) to make your position clear; whether your position remains clear or not will depend on the language you use, and the reasons you provide to support it. Even more importantly, simply writing '*In my view*' (etc.) at the beginning and end of your essay, and within your body paragraphs, is not enough to make your position clear throughout. Only the language and reasoning in your argument can do that.

Key idea: You are giving your position every time you make an argument or claim. Whether your position remains clear or not will depend on the language you use and the reasons you provide to support it. Writing '*In my view*' (etc.) at the beginning and end of your essay and within your body paragraphs is not enough to make your position clear throughout – only the language and reasoning in your argument can do that

Notice also that this argument resembles a writing task 2 question:

The government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit because fruit contains vitamin C, which is good for the health.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

This shows that every task 2 question presents an argument or a claim that you need to respond to with your own argument.

2.2 What makes a conclusion or an idea unclear?

Reasoning problems

An argument or idea can remain unclear even if the language used is accurate – although the language is clear, the reasoning is not. In fact, a great deal of band-6 writing contains confusing arguments rather than clear, valid ones. There are several causes of this. The first is making a point but not providing any reason for believing it. For example, simply stating that:

The government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit.

The reader needs to know how you know this or why you believe it.

The second problem occurs when, although a reason is presented, the evidence is not logically connected to the conclusion, or does not help to explain *why*, like this:

The government should encourage everyone to eat more fruit. For example, A BBC documentary showed that 85% of people eat fruit.

This type of example is extremely common in the essays I see – it presents a clearly invented fact that does not explain the previous point or add support to help us to believe it. In contrast, in a clear, valid argument, the reasons given are logically connected, and *do* help to persuade the reader that the conclusion is correct.

Among the statements below there are three clear arguments, and three sentences that I have extracted from essays that show band 6 Task response. Read through the statements carefully and think about the argument being made. On your worksheet, put a tick (✓) next to the statements that are clear, valid arguments and a cross (✗) next to the statements that are not valid.

Statements:

1. *It is very cloudy, so there could be a storm soon.*
2. *Student's academic results will increase when they have a peaceful place to study.*
3. *Mountain gorillas are an endangered species, so they could be extinct within a few years.*
4. *Many people dislike sport because there are not many sports facilities in their area.*
5. *People become distracted when they are using a mobile phone, so it should be illegal to use one when driving.*
6. *There are a wide range of jobs that robots will never be able to do, and they will eventually replace humans in most jobs.*

We can assess the validity of these arguments by identifying the conclusion and the reason given for believing it. To help show that these are conclusions based on the evidence provided, and that they tell us the writer's position, I have added 'I think' and 'because.'

	Conclusion	Reason given for believing it
1	<i>I think there could be a storm soon</i>	<i>because it is very cloudy ✓</i>
2	<i>I think students' academic results will increase</i>	<i>because they have a peaceful place to study ✗</i>
3	<i>I think mountain gorillas could be extinct within a few years</i>	<i>because they are an endangered species ✓</i>
4	<i>I think many people dislike sport</i>	<i>because there are not many sports facilities in their area ✗</i>
5	<i>I think it should be illegal to use a mobile phone when driving</i>	<i>because people become distracted when they are using a mobile phone ✓</i>
6	<i>I think robots will eventually replace humans in most jobs</i>	<i>because there are a wide range of jobs that robots will never be able to do ✗</i>

[Click here to see the table again.](#)

Numbers 1, 3, and 5, are clear, valid arguments because the reasons given are logical and the conclusion is clear. In the confusing or unclear arguments (numbers 2, 4, and 6), the reasons given do not logically support the conclusion. Instead of making a clear argument, these statements raise more questions:

Students' academic results will increase when they have a peaceful place to study.

Surely this will not apply to all students who have a peaceful place to study? What about other issues such as teachers, books, and resources?

Many people dislike sport because there are not many sports facilities in their area.

How can a lack of sports facilities show that people dislike sport?

There are a wide range of jobs that robots will never be able to do, and they will eventually replace humans in most jobs.

If there are so many jobs that robots cannot do, how can they eventually replace most humans?

It is sometimes more difficult to spot problems like this because the argument is made in separate sentences within a paragraph, with other ideas in between. Look at the following examples:

1) *Mountain gorillas are an endangered species. In fact, there are fewer than 800 left in the wild and their habitat is shrinking each year. They may even be extinct within a few years.*

2) *Robots will eventually replace humans in most jobs. It is more convenient for businesses to use robots as they do not need holidays or become sick. There are a wide range of jobs that robots will never be able to do.*

The first argument is clear, but the second is confusing because it makes two contradictory points: 1) *robots will replace humans in most jobs*, 2) *there are many jobs that robots cannot do*.

If we apply critical thinking to our ideas before we begin writing, we can check whether they are logically connected and make the necessary changes to present them clearly:

*Some people believe that robots will eventually replace humans in most jobs. After all, they can be more reliable than humans and do not become sick or need holidays. **Nevertheless**, there are still a wide range of jobs that robots will never be able to do.*

A further common problem occurs when the writer makes a logical leap between ideas, and provides no reasoning, expecting the reader to infer too much. For example:

Students' academic results can increase if they have a peaceful place to study.

To show the reader that this is a reasonable conclusion, the writer needs to explain how or why they believe this may occur:

The environment we study in is important. If there is too much noise, it can be very difficult to concentrate. In fact, even making sure that students have a peaceful place to study can improve their academic results.

2.3 Language problems

Sometimes an idea is unclear because of language problems. These may be related to grammar, vocabulary, or a combination of both. Look at the following example:

Primary level children are more sharp and their grasping power to learn something new is fast.

In spite of the language problems, we can still follow the idea. As a result, coherence is not affected, and the writer's argument and position are relatively clear. However, the same cannot be said about this example:


Hence, it is convenient for them to influence people for any service.

Here, the language problems do interfere with the meaning and our ability to follow the argument. Even knowing the context doesn't help – the essay was discussing whether there are more benefits or more problems to being famous – and the sentences before and after did not make the point any clearer.

Word choice can also have an impact on the validity of an argument. The following is typical of many of the band 6.5 essays that feature extreme language:

On the societal level, the results may be catastrophic if this is the case.

A catastrophe is a sudden event that causes a great deal of trouble or destruction, but the topic of this essay is whether countries are becoming more similar because people can now buy the same things in different countries. It would be very difficult to provide a logical argument to show that this development is 'catastrophic.' Words like this will only act as useful tools in your argument if you understand when and how to use them appropriately (*use less common lexical items **with some awareness of style** – band 7 LR*)

Extra practice 

This exercise will help identify any specific problems you have when making an argument. Look back through one or two essays you have written and find as many conclusions as you can (your points, or main ideas). Complete the table on your worksheet then use the following questions to think critically about your arguments:

- Did you always give a reason for your ideas?
- Are the reasons you provided logical?
- Are the reasons you gave true or did you invent them?
- Do they explain *why* you believe the conclusion or help to show the reader that your conclusion is correct?
- Do you need to explain some of your ideas further?
- Think about the language used in your argument. If you often use adjectives such as *catastrophic*, *disastrous*, *calamitous*, *controversial*, does the essay question justify the use of such extreme words? Replace them with more accurate and more commonly used adjectives to help improve your Task response (which is far more important than showing off vocabulary).
- Try to rewrite any problematic arguments so that your reasoning is clear and logical.

LESSON 3

CREATING DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARGUMENT

Now that we understand what a clear argument is, we can look at how to create one, with particular focus on the language needed to do this. There are several different ways to build an argument. The choice will depend on the ideas that occur to you when planning your essay – it cannot be decided in advance. This is because your ideas shape your argument, which then determines the language you must use. This cannot happen in reverse, beginning with the language, which is why a fixed template approach will not work.

3.1 Arguing by adding information

One way to build a clear argument is by presenting the different reasons that, when added together, led you to your conclusion. As you will see later on, in my planning, I use a plus sign (+) to show arguments like this.

Words and phrases often used in this type of argument are: *Firstly, Secondly, Thirdly, In addition, Similarly, also*, etc. Look at the argument below and try to identify three points or ideas (my conclusions) and three reasons for believing them. Then complete the table on your worksheet. (NB Adding 'because,' or 'therefore' can help you identify a reason or conclusion.)

*There are several reasons why the government collects taxes. **Firstly**, the money raised can be used to build new roads or public buildings. **Secondly**, existing infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, can be updated or repaired. **Finally**, these funds are needed to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police. **Thus**, taxes help improve the community while also making it safer.*

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Points to notice:

1. The 'reasons' given in this paragraph are my supporting evidence. I used my experience and knowledge of the world to think of these, which is what the task tells us to do. The points I make are my personal views about what this evidence shows or tells us. Remember, each of these points is a conclusion and reveals my position – if the reasons are unclear or illogical, then my position and conclusions will also be unclear, if they are missing, my ideas will be undeveloped.
2. The points I make are broad, general ideas. In contrast, the reasons given are more specific, and they provide concrete supporting evidence to support my ideas, even though I did not use the phrase 'For example.'
3. Notice my use of referencing. In my answers on the table, I used the word 'taxes' repeatedly. Look back at the original paragraph and make a note of each synonym that helps avoid this repetition when referring back to 'taxes'. This shows how building your vocabulary helps your writing.

Adding emphasis

The language used in this argument tells the reader that each reason is equally important. However, we sometimes want to show that one reason is more important than the others, as in the example below.

*There are several reasons why the government collects taxes. In terms of infrastructure, the money raised can be used to build new roads or public buildings, or to maintain existing structures such as schools and hospitals. **More importantly**, these funds are needed to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police. **Thus**, taxes **not only** help improve the community **but also** make it safer.*

The phrases in bold are used to show my position, which can be summed up as: there are several good reasons for collecting taxes, and I believe that safety is the most important of these. Other phrases you may find useful when making an argument like this are: *Moreover, Furthermore, What is more, Even more importantly.*

Notice that I did not use a connecting phrase between the first two sentences – the link between them is made clear through the use of referencing ('the money raised' refers back to 'collects taxes'). As we have seen, some writers go even further, omitting even more connecting words and phrases. As well as removing clear signposting, this also creates a different tone in the writing, and sometimes goes too far.

To show the effect this has, read the two versions below out loud.

Version 1

There are several reasons why the government collects taxes. Firstly, the money raised can be used to build new roads or public buildings. Secondly, existing infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, can be updated or repaired. Finally, these funds are needed to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police.

Version 2

There are several reasons why the government collects taxes. The money raised can be used to build new roads or public buildings. Existing infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, can be updated or repaired. The funds are needed to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police.

As a reader, which style do you prefer? The second version represents the limit on omitting connecting phrases – if we omit any more then we create problems with coherence and cohesion (the under-use of cohesive devices mentioned at band 7). This style is far more difficult for language learners to master, and is not one that I recommend you use – it will not boost your score. Your reader always needs clear signposting, and remember that the examiner is looking for evidence of this. Connecting words and phrases can only be omitted when there is clear referencing.

Can you identify the ways that the connections between the ideas are made clear in version 2?

🔊 Listening exercise

You may have noticed when reading aloud that, with version 2, you needed to adjust your tone to make the connections clear. Listen to the recordings to hear the difference. This illustrates the extra work the reader (your examiner) must undertake when you adopt a style like this.

[🔊 Click here to listen to version 1.](#)

[🔊 Click here to listen to version 2.](#)

To my ears, the second style sounds closer to a news report giving the facts as headlines; as we have seen, this also makes the reader work harder. This is why I don't use this style myself when writing. You may prefer something between these two:

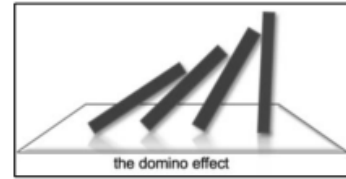
Version 3

*There are several reasons why the government collects taxes. The money raised can be used to build new roads or public buildings. Existing infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, can **also** be updated or repaired. **Furthermore**, the funds are needed to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police.*

Remember, *all* of these versions show band 9 skills, though versions 1 and 3 make life easier for both the reader and writer.

3.2 Arguing by showing cause and effect

Another way to prove that your conclusions about an issue are reasonable and logical is to show the effect that something has. The ideas within an argument like this need to be connected in a different way. Rather than separate reasons added together, these arguments show that one idea has an impact on a second, and perhaps even a third, in a domino effect.



They are all connected, like links in a chain, which is why we also refer to this as a chain reaction. This type of argument helps explain that you believe something is a good or bad idea because of the impacts it can have, and these provide the evidence in this type of argument. Generally, these arguments are based around facts or claims made by the writer, which may come from a claim made in the question itself, or may be based on your own knowledge or experience.

In my planning, I use an arrow (→) to show the connection between ideas in this kind of argument. Here are some examples of phrases that are often used to present an argument like this:

This means that...; This causes...; As a result, ...; in turn; If...then...

Look at the example below. Can you identify the claim being made and three effects this has? Write these on your worksheet and use arrows to show the connection.

In many big cities, the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who then have to find food and shelter for the homeless.

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Points to notice:

This argument relies on my ability to clearly explain a complex problem: a lack of houses leads to increased homelessness, which then increases problems for local charities. This complex chain of events forced me to produce complex grammatical structures. Complexity is not something you should aim to build into your writing through adding even more complex grammar points, creating overly long sentences, or using high-level vocabulary. At the lower levels, candidates are not able to explain complex ideas like this clearly and simply, while candidates at bands 7 and above can.

Key idea: If your main aim is to create complex sentences, the complex issues you are explaining will be confusing to the reader, and your argument will be impossible to follow. Explaining complex ideas in a clear and simple way will raise your chances of achieving band 7, not lower it.

3.3 Arguing by predicting a result or effect

You may want to prove that an action is good or bad by making a claim about the effect or result it *will*, *would*, *may*, or *could* have. In this type of argument, you are offering this predicted result as a reason for giving your support to it, or for deciding that it should not be allowed to happen. You may be sure of the effect because you have direct experience of it, or you may be expressing a future concern, or making a possible prediction.

This type of argument uses the language of speculation, and such sentences often begin with 'If' or 'When.' The language tells us how likely it is that the action will occur, and how confident the writer feels about the result of the action. Thus, if it is used accurately and appropriately, the language helps to make your position clear.

Identify the actions and results in the sentences (1 – 6) and write them in the table on your worksheet.

1. *If the government helps homeless people, this will solve all of their problems.*
2. *When homeless people are given free accommodation, their health often improves as a result.*
3. *If the government built more affordable housing, then this could improve the situation for many people.*
4. *When homeless people have nowhere to shelter, winter is extremely difficult for them.*
5. *Very few people would be upset if taxes were increased in order to help the homeless.*
6. *If people are unemployed for a long time, they may eventually become homeless.*

Look at the language used in the actions and decide if:

- A. the action already happens regularly
- B. the action is possible in the future
- C. the action is less likely to happen in the future

Look at the language used to talk about the result of these actions and decide whether the writer feels:


- D. 100% sure of this result (it is definite)
- E. 75% sure of this result (it is likely)
- F. 50% sure of this result (it is possible)

Underline the words and phrases that tell you how likely the action is and how sure the writer feels about the result.

What changes can you make to sentence number 1 to show that the writer is more cautious about the predicted result?

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

In your own writing, make sure that you do not make a firm prediction about a result unless you are very sure that it **will** happen. Review conditional tenses if you are not confident about these grammar points.

Extra practice 

- To practise further, look through any of your previous essays and scan your writing for the following words and phrases: *If, when, as a result, result in, causes, will, would, could, might*.
- Look carefully at the arguments you made using these words – is your position clear? Does the tense or verb accurately reflect how sure you feel about the result? (Think about your use of conditionals and modal verbs) Make a note of any grammar points you need to study and make sure to practise these often.
- If you have written any essays based on questions asking you to discuss the causes and effects of a problem, look at the body paragraphs in them. Identify any claims you have made and the effects that you discussed. How are the ideas in your argument connected? How did you show this connection? What improvements can you make?

LESSON 4 MORE COMPLEX ARGUMENTS

In *The Key to IELTS Success*, I discussed some common misunderstandings about the CEFR levels (A1 to C2). You can learn more about this in the vocabulary chapter of the book, but here I will simply restate that reaching level C1 or C2 (bands 7 to 9) does not mean using mostly C1-C2 vocabulary and grammatical structures. Candidates at C1 and C2 have mastered the language from A1 upwards, and they know when and how to use it appropriately and effectively. As this lesson will again show, it is the argument you make that creates complexity, not the language you use.

Key idea: Candidates at C1 and C2 (bands 7 to 9) have mastered the language from A1 to C2; they use high-level language accurately and at the appropriate time. You will show C1 and C2 skills by clearly explaining a complex argument, not by using as much high-level grammar or vocabulary as possible.

4.1 Arguing by showing contrast

We can provide strong reasoning or give extra support for an idea by making a point about a contrasting idea or argument. This can be a useful way of finding extra ideas when you are stuck. To get ideas like this, ask yourself, 'What would happen if we didn't have / do this?' or 'What happens when we don't have / do this?' For example, 'What happens if the government doesn't help poor people?'

The words and phrases you might find in this type of argument are:

If ...does not....then; Without

Look at the following example:

In many big cities, the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who have to find food and shelter for the homeless. If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this puts even more stress on community programmes, and causes homelessness to rise even further.

Points to notice:

- The tenses used here (the simple present and the conditional) indicate that the writer has some experience or knowledge of this topic, and feels very confident that these effects will happen. Remember, if you are less certain, you can show this by using modal verbs (*can, may* etc.) like this:

*If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this **can put** even more stress on community programmes, and **may cause** homelessness to rise even further.*

- The same language is useful in presenting a counterargument, which we will cover in lesson 7.

4.2 Combining different types of argument

At the moment, our paragraph is quite short. However, if we want to add another negative effect resulting from a lack of housing, we need to be very careful. A common mistake at band 6 is to simply add a new idea, like the final sentence here:

*In many big cities, the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who have to find food and shelter for the homeless. If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this puts even more stress on community programmes, and causes homelessness to rise even further. **In addition, it means that house prices and rents remain very high.***

This creates a referencing problem – the pronoun 'it' confuses the reader, and the conclusion becomes unclear. A pronoun refers back to the last noun mentioned, which in this case is 'homelessness':

*In many big cities, the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who have to find food and shelter for the homeless. If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this puts even more stress on community programmes, and causes homelessness to rise even further. **In addition, it means that house prices and rents remain very high.***

The reader understands this to mean: 'homelessness makes house prices very high,' an idea that would need to be clarified and explained further. The writer actually intended to make the point that, 'When the population exceeds the number of houses and flats available, this makes house prices high.' To show that we are referring back to this much earlier idea in the first sentence, we need to use a synonym, or paraphrase it, like this: '*In addition, a lack of accommodation...*'

This paraphrase clearly signals which 2 ideas are being linked by the connecting phrase, 'In addition.'

*In many big cities, **the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available**, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who have to find food and shelter for the homeless. If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this puts even more stress on community programmes, and causes homelessness to rise even further. **In addition, a lack of accommodation** means that house prices and rents remain very high.*

Which of the following points would follow on logically from this to conclude our paragraph?

*Thus, housing problems have an impact on everyone in the community.
Thus, houses are likely to become even more expensive in the future.
Thus, employment is also a very important issue.*

(You'll find the answer in the next extract.)

4.3 Joining ideas together to vary sentence length

High-level writers show an awareness of style, and try to vary the length of their sentences. Using a mixture of long and shorter sentences makes reading easier and also makes your writing less repetitive. Try reading this paragraph aloud to see how this variety helps:

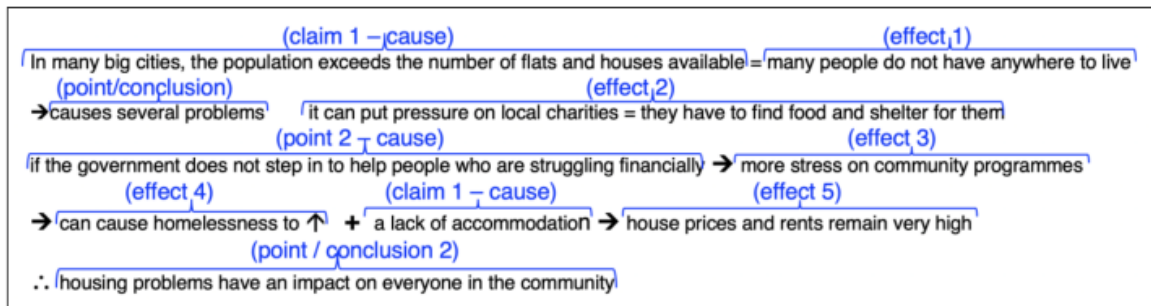
In many big cities, the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who have to find food and shelter for the homeless. If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this puts even more stress on community programmes, and causes homelessness to rise even further. In addition, a lack of accommodation means that house prices and rents remain very high. Thus, housing problems have an impact on everyone in the community.

The first sentence of the paragraph makes a claim, and the remaining sentences either explain the effects of this claim, or a reach conclusion about what these effects tell us. Remember, the effects can be seen as the supporting evidence or reasoning in this type of argument. On your worksheet, trace the development of the argument in the paragraph by labelling any claims, effects, and points or conclusions. Use symbols (→ or +) to show how the ideas are connected, then compare your answer to my version below.

Are there any new symbols you can use? Here are some other suggestions:

- ∴ (therefore / thus)
- = (this means)
- ↑ (rises / increases / goes up)
- ↓ falls / decreases / goes down)

Tracing the development of an argument




As the image above shows, this is a very complex argument. It combines arguing by showing cause and effect, arguing by showing contrast, and arguing by adding information. Because of this complexity, there is a greater chance of language errors, and it is particularly difficult to explain the progression of the argument clearly and simply. When planning, you need to be aware of how complex your argument is before you begin writing so that you can take extra care when connecting your ideas, and when referring back to a much earlier idea.

Key idea: In your planning, if you find yourself using a variety of symbols to show how your ideas are connected, this is a good indication that your argument is a complex one, and so you need to be very careful to explain it clearly.

Language note

We can say that A causes B or that B is the result of A. Reversing ideas like this is a useful way to avoid repeating the same language and structures. Here are some other variations:

- Eating too much fast food and a lack of exercise **can cause** obesity.
- Obesity **can be caused by** eating too much fast food and a lack of exercise.
- Obesity **is often the result of** eating too much fast food and a lack of exercise.
- Eating too much fast food and a lack of exercise **can result in** obesity.
- Eating too much fast food and a lack of exercise **can lead to** obesity.
- Obesity **can result from** eating too much fast food and a lack of exercise.

Extra practice 

- On your worksheet, practise changing the length of the sentences in our paragraph by doing the following:
 - make the first sentence shorter and the second sentence longer
 - break the third sentence up it into 2 shorter ones
 - connect the last 2 sentencesNB You may need to add referencing or connectors to make the links clear.
- Compare your version to mine and be sure to study and practise relative clauses if you struggle with this exercise.

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

- Rewrite the paragraph using one or more variations of the verb '*cause*' from the language note.

LESSON 5

EXPLAINING AND CLARIFYING IDEAS

As part of your argument, you may need to give an explanation. You can do this to explain the meaning of a key term, explain the context for your ideas, or explain a complex idea in a simpler way. A question I am often asked is, 'How do I know when I need to explain an idea?'

5.1 Explaining an idea – when and how

In lesson 4, we wrote about the topic of homelessness, and the issues surrounding this topic are generally the same in many parts of the world. However, this is often not the case, which is why your ideas sometimes need to be explained further. For example, when writing about eating healthily, one person might make the following argument:

It is important to eat fruit every day, because it contains vitamins that help keep us healthy. Therefore, I completely agree with the idea that schools should encourage all children to eat fruit.

However, someone with an intolerance to fruit, who gets a severe stomach ache and skin problems after eating it, may write:

Eating fruit makes people feel unwell, and it even affects their ability to work. Therefore, I completely disagree with the idea that schools should encourage all children to eat fruit.

Anyone without the same intolerance is likely to be confused by the first statement in this argument. Again, language plays a key part: this is not a fact that is generally true for *everyone*, yet the use of the simple present suggests that it is. Using modal verbs (*may, can, etc.*), as well as words and phrases like 'sometimes', 'for some people,' helps to clarify ideas like this. For example:

*Eating fruit **can make some people** feel unwell, and it **can even affect** their ability to work. Therefore, I completely disagree with the idea that schools should encourage all children to eat fruit.*

In this version, the writer has presented a fact that logically supports their argument, and helps the reader understand why they hold this position. Your test question will sometimes do this too:

There are now millions of cars on the road in most big cities. Pollution from cars is the most important problem that big cities face today.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

The first sentence in this writing task presents a fact to support the argument being made in the second sentence – that this type of pollution is 'the most important' problem that big cities face.

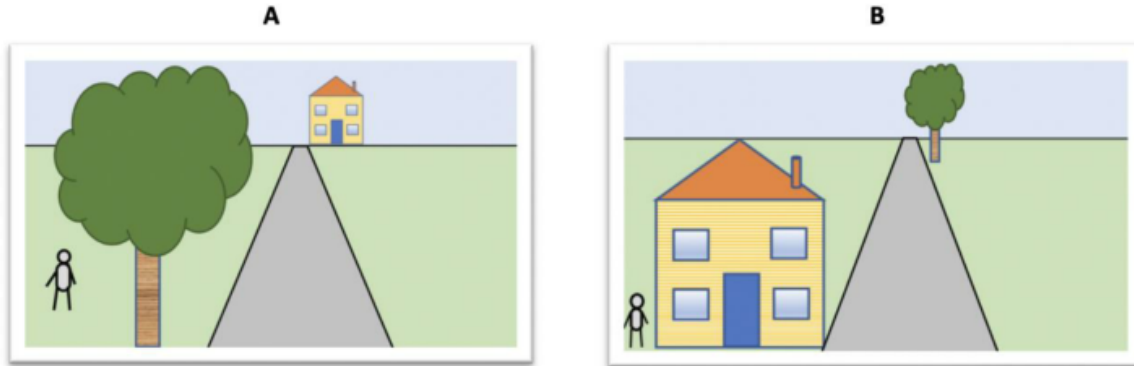
Fact and opinion

It is important to be able to tell the difference between a fact and an opinion. A fact is something that can be objectively measured and verified, while an argument or opinion cannot. In the test question, we know that the first sentence is a fact because we can verify it by counting the number of cars on the roads. We cannot verify the second statement because it is an opinion; we can only discuss it, and decide whether it is a valid argument or not. This is what your essay must do, which helps to explain why there is no right or wrong answer in task 2.

Key idea: In writing task 2, you will be presented with an argument that you must discuss and respond to, there is no right or wrong answer. The question will sometimes include a fact that supports the argument being made. You do not need to discuss this fact, but you should not ignore it – it is there to make the context for your essay clear.

5.2 Perspective

It is important to be aware when you are writing about things that are universally, or generally true, and when you are writing about things that are only true for you. This matters for bigger ideas too – your city will not necessarily look the same as my city, and it will not operate by the same rules, which are based on your culture and history. Thus, your ideas on city living, society, and life in general, will reflect your own background and experiences, and when you are writing, you need to help the reader see these issues from your viewpoint. Perspective matters.



To the person in these images, the tree and the house appear large or small, and easy to see or difficult to see, depending on where they are standing, and what is happening around them. This neatly illustrates the meaning of the terms *viewpoint*, *point of view*, and *position*. Thus, a rich person, who has always lived in a luxurious penthouse, will not have the same perspective on city life as a homeless person living in the same city. Similarly, someone with severe food allergies will not see the topic of food and diet in the same way as a person without these problems.

If you live in a city where the justice system is unfair, this will inevitably affect your opinions about this topic, so you need to explain the context for your argument when discussing this issue. If you are writing about traffic problems, and you live in a very busy city like Ho Chi Minh City, you need to help the examiner to see the problem as you see it – from your perspective. You can do this by explaining the context for your ideas, like this:

*Crime and punishment are extremely emotive issues in my country, where....
The traffic in my city is ..., so....*

Language note

In academic writing, or when writing about a serious issue, we often begin by defining key terms. This can help to explain the context for the ideas in your argument. For example, if you are writing about the topic of 'success', you could begin by defining what this word means to you, or in your culture, which may be different to the examiner's interpretation of the word.

Sometimes, we rephrase an idea in order to make it clearer. For example, in lesson 4, we wrote:

*Many cities have more people than houses. **This means that** many people do not have anywhere to live.*

In my planning, I use an equals sign (=) to represent this:

Many cities have more people than houses = many people do not have anywhere to live.

Rephrasing the issue in this way helped me to show a different way of looking at it; it changed the focus and helped to highlight how this issue affects the people involved. Other phrases that can be used like this are:

This means,which means, In other words,....

Whenever you use these phrases, what follows should be an explanation, or a different way to interpret what you have just said. However, the verb 'to mean' can also be used to show a consequence or result of something, like this:

*Increasing house prices **means** fewer people can afford to buy a house.*

Here, I would use an arrow to show the connection between these ideas:

Increasing house prices → fewer people can afford to buy a house.

Below are some extracts from band 6.5 essays that use these phrases, but only some of them are used correctly. On your worksheet, write out the plan of the ideas in extracts 1 – 4 using an equals sign (=) or an arrow (→) to connect them. Decide whether the underlined phrases are used accurately, and whether the writer is:

- A. explaining the meaning of something
- B. clarifying an idea
- C. showing a different way of looking at an issue
- D. showing the result or consequence of something

- 1) *If you have a lot of money you can buy whatever you want, which means that food will never be a problem for you.*
- 2) *In addition, sharing the cost of education and healthcare would also prevent people from taking it for granted. This means that having to pay for the service is equivalent to being more sincere.*
- 3) *Local businesses might suffer as they do not have the resources to beat off competition from multinational companies, and they might be eventually put out of work. This not only means a loss of jobs, but also a loss of traditional products, which is cause for even greater concern.*
- 4) *The possibility of finding the same shops selling the same variety of items in almost every corner of the world can be alarming. In other words, every country has its own culture with its own particular foods, which allow us to identify it from every other country.*

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

5.3 Jumping to a conclusion

In the writing task we saw, the argument about pollution in cities is a logical conclusion to reach given the fact about cars. When candidates don't allow enough time for critical thinking, they tend to jump to a conclusion that does not seem logical to the reader. The phrase 'jump to a conclusion' means reaching a quick decision when you don't have all of the evidence you need, or before considering the evidence. Here is an example of this:

John has arrived late for work every day this week. Clearly, he is not committed to his job.

The first sentence is a verifiable fact – we can check the time that John arrived at work every day. However, the second sentence jumps to a conclusion about what this fact tells us about John's attitude towards work. There are several reasons why John may be arriving late, such as problems with transport, a problem or illness at home, he may even have arranged with his manager to stay late to finish an important project and start the day later than normal. The fact in the first sentence requires further investigation before a valid conclusion can be reached about what it means. Similarly, in the writing test, if you do not stop to think, you will not gather the evidence needed to reach a valid, logical conclusion that you can then explain clearly. Even more importantly, if you jump to a conclusion about what the question means, then you are likely to lose marks for Task response.

Key idea: Take time to think carefully about the question - don't jump to a conclusion about what the question means. If you are interpreting the question from your own perspective, be sure to make this clear to the examiner.

Below is a paragraph from an essay sent to me by a high-level candidate who would like to score band 9 in writing. I have made language corrections so that we can focus on the argument and Task response problems. Read the paragraph and try to guess what the topic of the writing task was.

First, let us consider the disadvantages of this trend towards driving more. If people drive more and more, our fossil fuels are likely to be depleted in the very near future. By 2050, it is estimated that human beings will have used up all of the natural resources if people keep using their vehicles more. Spending more time driving to work also means that people will have less time at work to do meaningful tasks. If it takes a person about 30 minutes to get to their destination, then they will lose approximately 15 hours a month. That invaluable amount of time could be better spent. In addition, the more time people spend driving, the more carbon emissions there will be in the atmosphere, which will further exacerbate our current environmental problems.

I found it difficult to follow the logic of this argument – I could not understand how fossil fuels and natural resources could be logically connected to losing work time. The writer had originally contacted me because he was concerned about the need to explain ideas, which he said often resulted in him writing overly long answers. Looking at this paragraph, I was initially concerned that these ideas needed to be explained even further. However, when I saw the question, I began to understand the problem. This is what the task said:

Many people are now spending a lot of time travelling to work or school. Some people believe that this is a negative development while others think there are some benefits.


As you can see, driving is not mentioned at all, but work is. This writer had spent a considerable amount of the paragraph explaining an issue that is not mentioned in the question, and trying to connect this to the issue that is mentioned. When I asked why he had written about driving, he told me that he lives in a very busy city, with major traffic problems, where the vast majority of people drive to work or school every day. His perspective led him to interpret this question as, 'everyone is now driving even more when travelling to work.' In his city, the logical effects of this are that fossil fuels are being depleted, traffic is made worse, and work time is also being lost. Although you are being asked to use your own knowledge and experience to answer the question, the examiner needs help to be able to see the issue in the same way as you do.

What changes could you make to help the examiner see this candidate's perspective more clearly? On your work sheet, rewrite the paragraph so that the perspective is clear, and the argument is logically connected to the issue raised in the question. When you have finished, look at my version on the next page.

First, let us consider the disadvantages of this trend. In my country, the vast majority of people drive to school or work. Therefore, if people are spending more time travelling, this means that they are also driving more and more. Because of this, our fossil fuels are likely to be depleted in the very near future. In addition, the more people drive, the more carbon emissions there will be in the atmosphere, which will further exacerbate our current environmental problems. Spending more time driving to work and school also means that people will have less time to work on important tasks. If it takes a person about 30 minutes to get to their destination, then they will lose approximately 15 work hours a month. That invaluable amount of time could be much better spent if people were able to shorten their journeys.

Points to notice

- We can now understand the perspective and, as a result, the argument is clearer.
- I used the phrases 'In my country' and 'this means' to show a different way of looking at the issue raised in the question – one that reflects the perspective of the writer.
- I have changed the order of some ideas so that they are organised more logically.
- I cut this sentence: 'By 2050, it is estimated that human beings will have used up all of the natural resources if people keep using their vehicles more'. I did this because it is not necessary (the point about fossil fuels has already be explained) and it is not directly connected to the original question. Going off on a tangent like this will reduce your Task response score. We will learn more about this in later lessons.

Extra practice 

- Look back over your past essays and scan them for the phrases *In other words*, *this means*, or *which means*. On your worksheet, write out any sentences like this and replace the phrase with an equals sign (=) to help you decide whether you have used it accurately.

Did you use the phrase to:

- explain the meaning of something?
 - clarify an idea?
 - show a different way of looking at an issue?
 - show the result or consequence of something?
- Do you need to make any changes?
 - In previous essays, have you referred to your own town or city, or given a personal example? If you have, look back at the explanation you gave. Do you think you explained it clearly enough to help the examiner see your perspective? What changes can you make to help make this clearer?

LESSON 6

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE AND GIVING EXAMPLES

6.1 What is supporting evidence?

The writing task asks you to 'Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.' As we saw in lesson 2, it is important to see the evidence you provide in your essay as the reason you believe something to be true. Supporting evidence helps the reader to understand your main argument and shows your thinking, but attempts to do this cause problems even at band 7, where candidates may 'overgeneralise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus.' Only at band 8 are main ideas 'relevant, extended and supported,' and it is not until band 9 that they are 'fully extended and well-supported'. Clearly, providing relevant, focused support for your argument is a high-level skill.

The fact that supporting evidence is not mentioned at band 6 and below is often interpreted to mean that 'you must include examples to score band 7.' While this is true to a certain extent, the way in which this is done often continues to result in a score of band 6 or 6.5, which shows there is a problem with this advice. We'll begin by looking at typical band 6 examples, and why these often do not act as supporting evidence.

6.2 Common problems with examples

Problem 1: Template filling and invented examples

In many band 6 essays, each paragraph contains a separate sentence with an example. These are often invented statistics that sound odd, and they rarely help to explain or support the main idea in the paragraph. Such examples are provided mechanically, often at the very end of the paragraph, as though the writer is thinking, 'now I need to write an example,' rather than, 'how can I prove this point?'

The following paragraph was written by a native speaker who recently contacted me. The essay was about helping older workers to get a job. Do you think the example supports or explains the main idea?

To tackle this long-term problem, governments should provide a corporate tax incentive when they hire experienced people. That is to say that a lower income tax on the profits of companies would allow employers to hire the right people to perform the right job, without the need to lower HR fees. For example, a similar initiative was launched by the United States government in San Francisco, California, which has resulted in Tesla's yearly corporate taxes to reduce by 35%.

There were some grammatical issues in this essay (native speakers often use patterns common in spoken language), but the main problems are with Coherence and cohesion and Task response: the main ideas are inadequately developed and are unclear. How does lower income tax help companies to hire the right people? What is the relevance of lower HR fees? The example provided does not help the reader to understand any of these points, nor why the writer has concluded that 'governments should provide a corporate tax incentive when they hire experienced staff'.

The second paragraph also followed the same pattern: two sentences that are not logically connected followed by a very clearly invented example. The writer confirmed that he had been taught to use this same template approach in every essay. As a result, the last sentence *looks* like an example, but it does not support the previous idea – it does not perform the *function* of an example.

Key idea: Adding a sentence with an invented example will not provide supporting evidence for your ideas, or persuade the reader to believe them.

Problem 2: Examples that are not examples

In many essays I see, the examples given are not examples at all – they are often simply a repetition of the previous idea:

*On the other hand, if good transportation is provided to the public they will travel by public transport. **For example**, if fast metro trains are provided to people who go to work and students who go to school or colleges in the morning. **In addition**, if there are buses on different routes that cover all the important destinations, such as downtown, hospitals, schools, factories area. **An example of this is**, in London, people prefer to travel by buses because buses are fast and they go to famous places of the city.*

This paragraph is another good example of why a template approach will not work: there are cohesive devices here (in bold) that have been used as a framework for the paragraph, but they are not logically connected to the ideas in between. As a result, ideas are presented as 'examples' but they do not perform this function: they do not help to explain or support the writer's points or claims:

	Claim	Example of this
1	<i>If good transportation is provided to the public they will travel by public transport</i>	<i>if fast metro trains are provided to people who go to work and students who go to school or colleges in the morning</i>
2	<i>If there are buses on different routes that cover all the important destinations, such as downtown, hospitals, schools, factories area</i>	<i>in London, people prefer to travel by buses because buses are fast and they go to famous places of the city.</i>

Mapping out the ideas like this shows that the examples do not support the claims being made, and that writing 'For example,' is not enough – what follows this must provide evidence to support the previous idea, like this:

*If good public transportation is provided people will use it. **For example**, cities like London, Tokyo, and Singapore have excellent underground trains that are filled with people traveling to work, school or college every day. **In addition**, if there are buses on different routes that cover important destinations, **such as** hospitals and factories, these would also no doubt be used in preference to private cars, reducing traffic **as a result**.*

In this version, the connecting phrases are used because they are needed, and because they fit this argument. As a result, they are effective signposts, helping the reader to follow the development of the argument, and showing how the ideas are connected.

Key idea: If you begin with a template of cohesive devices and then attempt to fill in the gaps between them, the result will not be successful. Remember – your ideas and your argument must come first.

Problem 3: Using a trivial idea to support a serious or extreme conclusion.

In lesson 2, I referred to an argument made in an essay discussing whether 'countries are becoming more and more similar because people are able to buy the same products anywhere in the world'. In the essay, the writer used the example of a famous Spanish fashion store called Zara:

Some people may say that this is definitely a positive trend because it helps them save time and money. This is because nowadays it is no longer necessary to buy a plane ticket and spend 5 hours to get to the U.S to buy a Zara handbag. In my experience, this mindset genuinely reflects human nature since many of us have a tendency to think about our own interests first.

He went on to argue that

On the societal level, the results may be catastrophic if this is the case. Perhaps the worst-case scenario is that the global tourism industry may collapse.

The reasoning in this argument can be summarised as follows:

This is a positive trend because it saves us time and money (e.g. we no longer need to fly to the US to buy a Zara handbag) = human nature = people think of our own interests first → The global tourism industry may collapse

Mapping the ideas in this way shows the lack of logic in reaching this conclusion – the example does not support the conclusion that global tourism may collapse, and it is rather trivial in comparison. Another sample essay I found online discussed the topic of clothing now being the same everywhere in the world. The essay argued that people dressing the same everywhere in the world leads to the depopulation of rural areas but, on the other hand, it can also help solve world problems. If you find yourself reaching extreme conclusions like this, about a rather mundane topic, then you are not applying the critical thinking needed to produce a clear, well-developed argument, with focused, relevant supporting evidence.

Key idea: If your main ideas and conclusions are extreme, but your examples are trivial, then they will not support your argument. Apply critical thinking to produce the right evidence for a clear, well-developed argument.

6.3 Other ways of supporting your ideas

As we have seen, your main ideas or points are often broad and general, while your supporting evidence is more specific. To demonstrate this, look at these 2 paragraphs from previous lessons:

Paragraph 1

There are several reasons why the government collects taxes. Firstly, the money raised can be used to build new roads or public buildings. Secondly, existing infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, can be updated or repaired. Finally, these funds are needed to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police. Thus, taxes help improve the community while also making it safer.

Paragraph 2

In many big cities, the population exceeds the number of flats and houses available, which means that many people do not have anywhere to live. This causes several problems. Firstly, it can put pressure on local charities, who have to find food and shelter for the homeless. If the government does not step in to help people who are struggling financially, then this puts even more stress on community programmes, and causes homelessness to rise even further. In addition, a lack of accommodation means that house prices and rents remain very high. Thus, housing problems have an impact on everyone in the community.

On your worksheet, separate the ideas in the paragraphs into 'general ideas' and 'specific evidence.' Write the general ideas in the large circles, and the evidence in the rectangular boxes – some have been done for you.

[Click here to see answer 1](#)

[Click here for answer 2](#)

Points to notice:

- In almost every case, the ideas were supported without using a separate sentence beginning with 'For example...'
- The supporting evidence is relevant and focused; because of this, it supports the general ideas well.
- For variety, we can either begin with the supporting evidence and then draw a conclusion from this:

A. *These funds are used to pay the salaries of all government workers, including firefighters and the police. Thus, taxes help improve the community while also making it safer.*

Or we can make the point and then show our evidence for this by giving an example:

B. *Taxes help improve the community while also making it safer. For example, the funds are used to pay the salaries of government workers such as firefighters and the police.*

Although you do not need to begin a sentence with 'For example,' sometimes, it is both helpful and necessary. Look at these two claims I made in the previous lesson, and the examples I gave to support them:

Language note

In academic writing, or when writing about a serious issue, we often begin by defining key terms. This can help to explain the context for the ideas in your argument. **For example**, if you are writing about the topic of 'success', you could begin by defining what this word means to you, or in your culture, which may be different to the examiner's interpretation of the word.


Sometimes, we rephrase an idea in order to make it clearer. **For example**, in lesson 4, we wrote:

Many cities have more people than houses. This means that many people do not have anywhere to live.

I used these examples to show that my claims were true, but also to try to persuade you to take my claims seriously; putting each example into a separate sentence also helped me to highlight it.

An even more important point is that the writing of this book *began* with the many examples people have sent to me over the last 9 years. I looked carefully at this evidence and thought, '*What can we learn from this?*' I did not think of some points I wanted to make and then invent examples. You must take the same approach in your writing.

Key idea: Include an example to make an idea clearer or help to show that the argument and point you are making is a valid one. Finish your paragraphs with a general point rather than with an example.

Extra practice 

Look back through your previous essays and find some examples you have used. Ask yourself the following questions to identify any problems you have:

- Do you tend to use examples in a mechanical way, e.g. always at the end of a paragraph?
- Did you invent your examples?
- Is the example more trivial than the main idea or conclusion it is supporting?
- Is your example really just repeating an idea?

On your worksheet, write out some of your examples along with the idea they are supporting. Reverse your sentences as I did in example A above. In other words, write the example first (without the words '*For example*') and begin your next sentence with '*Thus,...*' Ask yourself the following questions to check whether your examples are acting as good, focused, supporting evidence:

- Is the example relevant to the main idea of your paragraph and to the essay question?
- Does the point you are making follow on logically from your example?
- If not, what logical conclusion can you draw from your example? (What *does* your example show?) Is this relevant to the main idea of your paragraph or to the essay question?
- Try to decide if your problem is with the main ideas and points you are making, the examples you have used to support them, or a combination of the two.

LESSON 7

STRENGTHENING YOUR ARGUMENT: COUNTERARGUMENTS

7.1 Presenting a counterargument

What is a counterargument?

Presenting a counterargument in your essay is a high-level skill, and the problems associated with this idea are complex. The following analogy may help to make the concept clearer. Imagine that you have a good job, and you may be promoted soon, but you have been offered a new job in a different country. Before reaching a decision, you would naturally think carefully about all sides of the issue. You would consider the benefits of staying in your current job, as well as the benefits of the new job. You would also consider the disadvantages of both ideas. If someone asked you, 'What did you decide to do?' You might say:

'I'm going to take the job because it's a really good opportunity. I know you might think that I'll miss out on getting a promotion, but the pay is better, and I think I'll learn so much more if I go.'

This speaker is showing that they reached a decision after considering all sides of the issue; they show this by:

Presenting an argument: *I'm going to take the new job because it's a really good opportunity.*

Acknowledging a counterargument: *I know you might think that I'll miss out on getting a promotion.*

Refuting* the counterargument: *But the pay is better and I think I'll learn so much more.*

Acknowledging the counterargument in this way makes the argument stronger than simply saying, 'I've decided to take the job because it's a really good opportunity and I will learn a lot in the new job.'

**Vocabulary note: To refute means to say or prove that an opinion is wrong.*

Key idea: An argument is made stronger by not only presenting evidence to support your conclusions, but also by considering, and then refuting, the argument that is against, or 'counter', to it: the counterargument. Doing this shows that you considered all sides of the issue before reaching your conclusion.

How is this relevant to IELTS?

The following examples help to see this analogy in terms of some typical writing task 2 questions:

1. *Some people think it is better to stay in the same job all your working life. To what extent do you agree or disagree?*
2. *Some people think it is better to stay in the same job all your life. Others think it is better to do different jobs throughout your career. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.*
3. *Nowadays, people change jobs more often than in the past. Is this a positive or a negative development?*
4. *People are now more likely to have several different jobs throughout their career than in the past. Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?*

When responding to each one of these questions, you can present an argument for changing jobs, and discuss the counterargument – the argument for staying in the same job. With questions 2 to 4, you **must** respond by considering both of these sides. Only question 1 is different.

Some people think it is better to stay in the same job all your working life. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

To what extent do you agree or disagree? Do you agree or disagree?

Only with questions like this, and the General Training equivalent of 'Do you agree or disagree?', do you have a choice in the way you respond. With these questions, you can:

- A. present an argument that looks at both sides, then reach a conclusion about it
- B. present an argument for only the side you agree with
- C. present an argument for only the side you agree with, while also mentioning, and refuting, the counterargument.

In my experience, students like to be given fixed rules, not choices like this. Teachers also prefer to give one clear answer, rather than a more confusing response of, 'just decide for yourself'. However, because people differ in their approach, it is difficult for self-study students to know which approach to take.

Teachers generally adapt their approach depending on the level of the students they have in their class, their own past experience (the approach they know they have had success with), and the amount of time they have with their students. Many students want certainty and a quick solution, so there is little time to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. The table below attempts to show these:

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
(A) <i>presenting an argument that looks at both sides, then reaches a conclusion about it</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It's easier to plan and get ideas. ● It helps to avoid repetition within your essay. ● All parts of the question are covered. ● Can score up to Band 9 if managed well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Candidates may not make their own position clear throughout – especially when discussing the side that they say they don't agree with. (If their position is not clear throughout, they remain stuck at band 6.5)
(B) <i>presenting an argument for only the side you agree with</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It's easier to make sure that your position is clear throughout. ● Can score up to Band 9 if managed well – though this is difficult to achieve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is often misinterpreted as: 'You must only discuss the side you agree with.' As a result, many candidates lower their Task response score by ignoring part of the question. ● It makes candidates less flexible and less able to adapt to the question they are given. ● Candidates often repeat the same key ideas, which again lowers their Task response score. (Therefore, they remain stuck at band 6.5)
(C) <i>presenting an argument for only the side you agree with but also mentioning the counterargument</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With high-level students (band 7+), this helps them present a well-balanced argument thus improving their score. ● Can score up to band 9 if managed well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Similar problems to those with approach B and: ● presenting a counterargument is very difficult to manage – it is generally managed well only from band 8. ● With lower levels (below band 7), many interpret this as 'I must include a counterargument to boost my score.' If they lack the skills to do this, their position is not clear throughout. (Therefore, they remain stuck at band 6.5)

To clarify, the disadvantages listed here reflect the results of using these approaches, which I have repeatedly seen in the band 6.5 essays sent to me over the past 9 years.

Teachers make an informed decision about which approach to take with their class. Option A is the approach that I favour, and one that I will mainly use in the model answers. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, because I no one has ever sent me a successful attempt using approach B or C that would score more than band 6.5. In contrast, I have managed to coach people to band 7 or 7.5 in writing using approach A – for me, the advantages of this approach outweigh the disadvantages. Secondly, I believe approaches B and C require help and feedback from a teacher in a classroom in order to mitigate the problems associated with them, and this book is aimed at those who do not have the benefit of this. Thirdly, I wrote 16 model answers for this book and felt that approach C was appropriate for only one of those.

Nevertheless, this last point should not be taken as a reason to abandon approach C altogether. In my view, approach C is most appropriate when I have strong feelings in favour of or against an argument. This is rarely the case in writing tasks I have seen – I can genuinely see positives and negatives on both sides in most tasks. However, my answers reflect my own perspective, and your perspective is likely to be completely different to mine; you may find that you respond to certain essay topics in a much stronger way because of your personal experience. This highlights the fact that the approach you take should be flexible, and should always depend on your natural response to the issue raised in the task.

Key idea: Task 2 questions do not fall into neat 'types' – they have several variables. You must be flexible in your approach and adapt to each individual task. Deciding you will always include a counterargument, or that you will never discuss the side you disagree with, means you will not be flexible in the way you approach each task. This is a little like going into a maths test and deciding that you will always use long division, even when the question does not call for it, just to show that you have studied this.

Why do counterarguments cause problems?

When presenting a counterargument, you might be able to concede* a point, but it is always important to refute it, showing *why* you do not hold the same position. Conceding and refuting are high-level skills that candidates below band 8 struggle with. Band 6 or 6.5 candidates often present the counterargument in a way that suggests they agree with it, which is not only confusing for the reader but also means that their own position is not made clear throughout, guaranteeing they remain at this level. In effect, band 6.5 candidates present a counterargument like this:

'I've decided to take the new job because it's a good opportunity. It is a terrible idea. I will miss out on a promotion here, and I will struggle a lot in the new job. Therefore, I have decided to leave.'

**Vocabulary note: To concede means to accept or admit that the opposite viewpoint may also be valid.*

Many band 6 candidates also appear to add a counterargument in much the same way as they add an invented example in every paragraph – it is presented in a rather mechanical way, no matter what their argument is. As we saw with examples, you should only include a counterargument if you feel it is necessary or helpful. In other words, if it will support and strengthen your argument, and you are confident you have the skills to make your own position clear throughout.

Why bad advice causes problems

By far the easiest way to present a clear counterargument to say, '*Some people may think XYZ, but I think ABC.*' If you are at band 5 or 6, or a teacher of lower level candidates, this is the approach I would recommend. Unfortunately, a great deal of the advice about IELTS focuses on imposing unnecessary rules or limits on the language that you can or must use. For example, many people follow bad advice that says you must only use the passive in IELTS, and even that you should avoid using 'some'. This is not at all helpful in an essay where you need to be clear about your own thoughts and make your own position clear.

If you write, '*It is thought,*' or '*It is felt,*' then you are not telling the examiner what *you* think or feel. Similarly, if you write '*Staying in the same job is good because...*,' rather than '*Some people argue that staying in the same job is good...*' then you are presenting an argument *you support* rather than a counterargument that you disagree with.

Key Idea: If you are following advice that says you must not use 'some' and that you must always use the passive, then you are following bad advice that is likely to keep you stuck at band 6.5.

7.2 The language of counterarguments: conceding and refuting

How should I use a counterargument?

When answering, 'To what extent do you agree or disagree?' or 'Do you agree or disagree?' questions, I am often asked how or when to include a counterargument. The examples below show, very briefly, some different ways you can do this.

The following arguments might be made in answer to our previous question:

*Some people think it is better to stay in the same job all your working life.
To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

NB The blue print shows the writer's position, and the red shows the counterargument.

If you completely agree, you might present an argument and counterargument like this:

My position and argument:	I completely agree because staying in the same job is rewarding, and also increases your chance of promotion.
The counterargument:	Some people might say it is boring to stay in the same job.
Conceding a point:	It is true that there is less variety.
*Refuting this point:	However, I believe changing jobs too often can be unsettling and you may actually learn less.

Or, you may choose to discuss the counterargument earlier in your essay:

The counterargument:	Some people might say it is boring to stay in the same job.
Conceding a point:	It is true that there is less variety.
Refuting this point:	However, I believe changing jobs too often can be unsettling and you may actually learn less.
My position and argument:	Therefore, I completely agree, because staying in the same job is not only rewarding but also increases your chance of promotion.

If you completely disagree, you might present an argument and counterargument like this:

My position and argument:	I completely disagree, because staying in the same job means you become bored and lose motivation.
The counterargument:	Some people might say you have a better chance of promotion by staying in the same job.
Conceding a point:	That may be true for some people.
Refuting this point:	However, this is not true for everyone, many people have to apply for higher positions in a different company.

Or this:

The counterargument:	Some people might say you have a better chance of promotion by staying in the same job.
Conceding a point:	That may be true for some people.
Refuting this point:	However, this is not true for everyone, many people have to apply for higher positions in a different company.
My position and argument:	Therefore, I completely disagree because staying in the same job means you become bored and lose motivation.

These are just some of the ways that an argument and counterargument can be managed with this type of question. As we saw in the previous lesson, there is no right or wrong answer, it is simply a question of deciding what your position is then clearly explaining why you hold this position.

Key idea: If you are presented with one viewpoint and asked if you agree or disagree with it, or to what extent you agree or disagree, you should only discuss on one side if you are confident that you can:

- cover *all* parts of the task
- make your own position clear throughout
- avoid repeating the same key ideas

This same also applies if you concede and refute the points in the counterargument.

As we saw earlier, a counterargument often begins by conceding a point. The verb 'to concede' means to accept or admit that the opposite viewpoint may also be valid. Essentially, you are saying, 'I understand the opposing argument, and it may have some good points, but...'

Words and phrases that are often used to introduce an idea like this are:

Admittedly, ... Some people may argue...

Your counterargument will also refute this argument, essentially saying '...but I still don't agree with it.' Words and phrases used to show that we are refuting a point are:

Nevertheless, While, Although, Having said that, ...

A counterargument may combine these in different ways, as the following example shows. Below is an example of a counterargument that could be added to strengthen the earlier argument we made in lesson 6 about why the government should help homeless people:

Many cities have more people than houses. This means that many people do not have anywhere to live, which can put pressure on local charities and homeless shelters. In addition, a lack of accommodation means that house prices and rents remain very high, which shows that housing problems affect everyone in the community. Therefore, it seems clear that the best way to address these problems is through a combination of government aid and extra housing.

Although some people may argue that governments cannot be held responsible when people lose their home, without any state intervention, this situation can often become much worse. Thus, in my view, it is crucial.

Look at the way I introduced this counterargument. To make it clear that I do not agree with this position, I needed to refute it. Which part does this?

In this image, I have highlighted the words and phrases that help the reader follow the thread of this counterargument and make my position clear. Again, notice the role that grammar, connectors, and vocabulary play here.

Many cities have more people than houses. This means that many people do not have anywhere to live, which can put pressure on local charities and homeless shelters. In addition, a lack of accommodation means that house prices and rents remain very high, which shows that housing problems affect everyone in the community. Therefore, it seems clear that the best way to address these problems is through a combination of government aid and extra housing.

Although some people may argue that governments cannot be held responsible when people lose their home, ***without*** any state intervention, ***this situation can often become much worse. Thus, in my view, it is crucial.***

If used appropriately and accurately, words and phrases like this form useful signposts for the reader to follow. Conversely, when these words are *not* used appropriately, the result is greater confusion for the reader.

The following is typical of the attempted counterarguments I see at band 6.5:

Many cities have more people than houses. This means that many people do not have anywhere to live, which can put pressure on local charities and homeless shelters. In addition, a lack of accommodation means that house prices and rents remain very high, which shows that housing problems affect everyone in the community. Therefore, it seems clear that the best way to address these problems is through a combination of government aid and extra housing.

In contrast, governments cannot be held responsible when people lose their home, they must find a way to help themselves. They can find a job or ask their family for help. Without any state intervention, this situation can often become much worse. Thus, in my view, it is crucial.

Although there is an attempt to signal that this viewpoint is 'In contrast' with the previous point, the writer presents the opposing argument but does not make it clear that they do not share these views. If you write, 'Governments cannot be held responsible when people lose their home, they must find a way to help themselves,' you are presenting this as *your position*. This is confusing for the reader because, instead of presenting and refuting a counterargument, the writer presents two contradictory arguments:

- *Governments cannot be held responsible...people must help themselves.*
- *Without state intervention this situation can become worse...thus it is crucial.*

Here is a reminder of how this counterargument should be made in order to make the writer's position *clear throughout*:

Many cities have more people than houses. This means that many people do not have anywhere to live, which can put pressure on local charities and homeless shelters. In addition, a lack of accommodation means that house prices and rents remain very high, which shows that housing problems affect everyone in the community. Therefore, it seems clear that the best way to address these problems is through a combination of government aid and extra housing.

Although some people may argue that* governments cannot be held responsible when people lose their home, ***without any state intervention, ***this situation can often become much worse. Thus, in my view, it is crucial.*****

7.3 Dealing with problems in counterarguments

The following paragraph was sent to me by a candidate who wanted to practise writing a counterargument. The essay question asked him to discuss whether prison is the best form of punishment for criminals. His paragraph illustrates several key problems, which we will deal with one by one. First, read the paragraph and try to identify the writer's overall position. Does he agree or disagree that prisons are the best form of punishment for criminals?

Another argument in favour of prisons, especially the tough ones, is to send a strong message to would-be criminals so as to make them think twice before committing crimes. While the daunting hand of law enforcement and severe punishments might prevent some offences, it will be the inmates' families who are likely to harbour animosity toward the public and the judicial system and sometimes vow to enact vengeance. Households with an incarcerated family member cannot thus be expected to respect the law and turn out law-abiding citizens the same as others.

Problem 1 - A lack of a clear central idea

When I pointed out that there was no clear central topic in this paragraph, the writer replied, 'But I know that you can infer the main idea in a paragraph'. Remember, the examiner is not taking your reading test, he or she is looking for a clear main idea in each paragraph, and assessing your answer based on this. If the examiner cannot find it, they cannot reward it.

Key idea: The examiner is not taking your reading test, he or she is looking for a clear central topic in each paragraph and assessing your answer based on this. Don't hide the main idea or topic – if the examiner cannot find it, they cannot reward it.

Problem 2 - The position is not clear throughout

This writer told me that he is very much against the use of prisons, and that his overall position is, 'I completely disagree that prisons are the best form of punishment'. I was surprised by this because the beginning of the paragraph tells the reader that it will present 'Another argument in favour of prisons', which suggests that the previous paragraph also presented an argument in favour of prisons. At the end of this paragraph, the writer's conclusion about prisons is very unclear. This is a good demonstration of band 6 Task response: the writer's overall position on this issue is not *clear throughout the response*.

Problem 3 – Perspective problems - main ideas are unclear

I was also confused about the argument regarding families, and the reasons why they might not be 'law-abiding' were very unclear to me. When I asked about this, the candidate explained that, in his country, people are imprisoned unfairly, even for petty crimes. As a result, their families often feel very resentful towards the prison system and may take actions against it. This was the context for his argument, but he failed to explain it in his writing. Because of this, his conclusions and main ideas remain unclear to the reader.

Problem 4 – Language and writing style

I am often struck by the fact that, in a private message, people can explain their ideas to me in fluent band 7 or 8 language, but when writing an essay, they will revert to band 6 – 6.5 language. This is how the candidate explained his argument to me when he was just focused on communicating, instead of trying to show all of the vocabulary he had learned on the topic of crime, or trying to make me infer his ideas:

The main idea, as I planned, is that prisons cannot reduce the crime rate by sending a strong message to would-be criminals. What I mean is that tough prisons might be frightening and, as a result, a deterrent; however if prisoners suffer, while inside, their families will hate the judicial system and may turn into antisocial individuals. I think people have a close bond with their family members and show sympathy to them.

Notice how much clearer and more natural this is, and how easy it is to follow compared to his practice paragraph. This is what he meant, so this is what he should have written. This also highlights why writing is more difficult than speaking – there is no listener to show their confusion and ask you to clarify or explain. It is difficult to imagine someone not knowing what you are so familiar with, but you need to keep this in your mind and adjust your explanations accordingly. Try to see your examiner as a colleague in another country that you are explaining an idea to, rather than an important judge you must try to impress.

Fixing the problems

Now that we understand the candidate's perspective, we can identify his argument and position, the counterargument, and the argument that can be used to refute this:

The writer's position: *Prisons are not the best form of punishment for criminals.*

Counterargument: *Prisons can act as a deterrent to reduce crime.*

Argument that will refute this: *If people are imprisoned unjustly, their families will react and may become antisocial, which may increase crime.*

On your worksheet, try to rewrite the practice paragraph. Try to:

- have one clear central topic
- concede a point in the counterargument
- refute this argument
- make the writer's position and perspective clear

When you have finished, compare your version to mine and make a note of any language you would like to learn and practice.

[Click here to see my version](#)

On your worksheet, write out the words and phrases in the model paragraph that show:

- *the central topic*
- *the counterargument*
- *the writer is conceding a point in the counterargument*
- *an argument used to refute this point*
- *the context and perspective for this argument*
- *the writer's position is clear*

[Click here to see the answers](#)


Can you identify these same points in your paragraph? What changes do you need to make?

Points to notice

1. There is a clear central topic identified at the beginning of the paragraph.
2. The writer's position is clear throughout – we know what the writer believes, and we understand that the counterargument is something that other people believe.
3. The connections between all of the ideas are clearly signposted.
4. The language used to refute this argument is similar to that from lesson 4, where we looked at showing contrast.

Key idea: Remember, to boost your score, be sure to:

- write clearly,
- make your position clear throughout,
- and help the examiner see your perspective.

Extra practice 

Look back at any of your previous essays where you believe you have made a counterargument.

- Did you make your own position clear?
- Did you refute the counterargument?
- Do you need to help the reader understand your perspective and position?

Make any necessary changes and rewrite one or two of your counterarguments using the words and phrases from this lesson.

LESSON 8 PARAGRAPH WRITING

8.1 Progression and Development within an argument.

In lesson 2, we looked at problems in sentence-level arguments. When it comes to longer arguments, the problems become more complex, and have an impact on both development (Task response) and progression (Coherence and cohesion).

As we have seen, individual arguments are logically connected through meaning, the effective use of linking words and phrases, and referencing (using a synonym or pronoun). In an earlier example we looked at, one candidate wrote, 'On the societal level, the results may be catastrophic if this is the case.' This argument can only show clear progression if the reader can easily understand what the terms 'if this is the case', and 'the results' refer to. If these other ideas remain unclear, then the whole argument will also be unclear. Thus, problems with progression are often connected to problems with cohesive devices, and to referencing in particular. These issues need to be controlled **throughout your essay** to achieve band 7 or above.

In terms of Task response, an argument is not well-developed (band 8) or fully developed (band 9) if the ideas do not form a complete or clear picture when judged together. Seeing this in terms of a physical structure, such as a house, may help:

Problems within individual arguments (CC) have an impact on the whole essay (TR)



The following paragraph helps illustrate band 6 problems in progression and development. It is an extract from an essay discussing whether schools should be responsible for teaching children good behaviour and right from wrong, not just parents. Here is the original version:

Children spend the larger part of their day at schools, where the teachers can cultivate their minds with knowledge that is not only important for their career, but also that can help them grow as a wise adult. They can mentor these in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities where they can learn to differentiate wrong from right. Additionally, children get engaged in various extra-curricular activities at school, where often they are asked to dress-up like great leaders or persons. While doing so, they get curious to know about these persons which can help them in emulating their traits which consequently get integrated into their personality. Therefore, the role of schools in instilling the good behaviourism is much more crucial as compared to those of the parent.

To highlight the Task response and Coherence and cohesion problems, I have corrected the grammar and vocabulary. You can see the new version on the next page.

Children spend the largest part of their day at school, where the teachers can cultivate their minds and impart knowledge that is not only important for their career, but that can also help them grow into wise adults. They can mentor them in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities, where they can learn to tell right from wrong. Additionally, children become engaged in various extra-curricular activities at school, where often they are asked to dress up like great leaders. While doing this, they become curious and want to know more about these people, which can help them in emulating their traits, which consequently become integrated into their personality. Therefore, the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is much more crucial than that of the parent.

Which of these problems can you identify in this paragraph? (You may choose more than one).

- A. uses cohesive devices effectively but cohesion between sentences is faulty
- B. does not always use referencing clearly
- C. a lack of a clear central topic within the paragraph
- D. presents a relevant position although conclusions become unclear
- E. presents relevant main ideas but some are inadequately developed / unclear

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

We'll go through these problems one by one.

8.2 Addressing coherence and cohesion problems

- Uses cohesive devices effectively but cohesion between sentences is faulty
- does not always use referencing clearly

Children spend the largest part of their day at school, where the teachers can cultivate their minds and impart knowledge that is not only important for their career, but that can also help them grow into wise adults. They can mentor them in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities, where they can learn to tell right from wrong. Additionally, children become engaged in various extra-curricular activities at school, where often they are asked to dress up like great leaders. While doing this, they become curious and want to know more about these people, which can help them in emulating their traits, which consequently become integrated into their personality. Therefore, the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is much more crucial than that of the parent.

This paragraph shows mixed success in using cohesive devices. Here are the examples of those that are managed well (NB, these were not all managed well in the original version.)

*Children spend the largest part of **their day at school, where** the teachers can knowledge that is **not only** important for their career, **but that can also** in many different ways, **for instance through** **Additionally**, children become **at school, where** often they dress up like great leaders. **While doing so, they** **Therefore**, the role of*

Each example is a signpost showing how two ideas are connected – this is what cohesion means. However, the use of referencing in this paragraph sometimes causes confusion, making it difficult to follow the ideas. Scan the paragraph to find 13 pronouns (*they, them, their* etc.) then decide whether the pronouns are referring to:

- A. children
- B. teachers
- C. great leaders

Remember, a pronoun is used to take the place of a noun, but its meaning is only clear when it refers back to the last noun mentioned.

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

If you were confused by numbers 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 13, it is because the reference is not clear. We don't need to replace all of these, but we do need to make some of the references clearer. On your worksheet, try to fix these problems yourself, then study my suggestions on the next page.

Suggested solutions:

The teachers can mentor them in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities where they can learn to tell right from wrong. Or: They can mentor the students in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities where they can learn to tell right from wrong.

While doing so, the students become curious and want to know more about these people, which can encourage the children to emulate their qualities, which consequently become integrated into their own personality.

The second sentence shows a further common coherence problem at band 6.5 – it contains too many different ideas and so it is difficult to follow. This often happens when candidates write overly long, complex sentences. To make the meaning clearer, we need to rewrite this as 2 or 3 separate sentences. Try to do this yourself by adding:

- *a cohesive device to make the links clear (e.g. a linking phrase and / or a reference)*
- *modal verbs where necessary (can, might, may, it is possible etc.)*

When you have finished, compare your version to mine:

[Click here to see the answer.](#)

Key idea: The examiner must be able to follow your reasoning to give you a score of band 7 or above, the more difficult this is to do, the lower your score. The language you use (referencing, modal verbs, the length of your sentences) can have an impact on the examiner's ability to follow your argument and understand your conclusions.

Reading aloud

Read this new version of the whole paragraph aloud. Can you notice an 'over-use' or repetition of one structure?

Children spend the largest part of their day at school, where the teachers can cultivate their minds and fill them with knowledge that is not only important for their career, but that can also help them grow into wise adults. They can mentor the students in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities, where they can learn to tell right from wrong. In addition, children become engaged in various extra-curricular activities at school, where they are often asked to dress up like great leaders. While doing so, the students may become curious and want to know more about these people, which could encourage the children to emulate their qualities. These positive traits may even become integrated into their own personality. Therefore, the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is much more crucial than that of the parent.

[Click here to see the answer.](#)

Reading your writing out loud in this way helps you to notice repetition more easily. I find that I stumble when trying to read aloud any of my writing that is unclear, so it is also very useful for checking and editing. Although you cannot do this in a test situation, practising like this before your test should help you to silently read over your work in a more focused way – I find I can make my inner voice seem 'louder' when I want to do this type of final checking.

A lack of a clear central topic

In *The Key to IELTS Success*, I described a method for writing a paragraph known as PEEL. The **P** refers to making a **Point**, which is then **Explained**, **Expanded**, and clearly **Links** back to the question. The point (P) and link (L) also act as a frame for the main idea within the paragraph, and these are a good way to ensure that you 'present a clear central topic' (band 7) – provided, of course, that these sentences accurately reflect the idea within the paragraph. Look at the first and last sentences in our paragraph. Do you think that these help to 'present a clear central topic?'

Children spend the largest part of their day at school, where the teachers can cultivate their minds and impart knowledge that is not only important for their career, but that can also help them grow into wise adults. They can mentor them in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities, where they can learn to tell right from wrong. Additionally, children become engaged in various extra-curricular activities at school, where often they are asked to dress up like great leaders. While doing this, they become curious and want to know more about these people, which can help them in emulating their traits, which consequently become integrated into their personality. Therefore, the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is much more crucial than that of the parent.

The first sentence tells us that the central topic in this paragraph will be: 'schools and teachers cultivating the minds of children to fill them with knowledge that is important for their career and helping them grow into wise adults.' This is too long and complex to be a helpful signpost for the reader, but it also does not seem accurate – the children's careers are never mentioned again. This sentence would work better as a second sentence, which shows a common problem I see – the first sentence (and sometimes also the last sentence) of the paragraph is missing. The writer's overall argument in this paragraph seems to be that 'schools have a lot of influence on children's behaviour', and this idea would produce a much more appropriate first sentence.

In the final sentence, the writer makes a good attempt at linking this paragraph to the question. However, it claims that this paragraph proves that 'the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is much more crucial than that of the parent.' This conclusion is not supported by the evidence given here – the role of parents is not mentioned at all. A more appropriate sentence would be: *Therefore, the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is a significant one.* Revising the first and last sentences so that they accurately reflect the ideas in the paragraph will significantly improve the Coherence and cohesion score here.

8.3 Addressing Task response issues

Presents a relevant position although conclusions become unclear;
Presents relevant main ideas but some are inadequately developed / unclear

The argument being made in this paragraph is that 'schools have a lot of influence on children's behaviour.' This is the main idea or conclusion that needs to be made clear. The ideas within the paragraph need to explain and support this point if we want to present an adequately developed response. Remember, these explanations must help the reader to understand *why* the writer believes this, and show that it is a valid argument or conclusion.

Below, you will find our current paragraph after the suggested changes have been made. To help us identify any Task response problems, on your worksheet, complete the table with the explanations or support given for each of the ideas listed (the points and claims being made here.) The first one has been done for you.

Schools have a lot of influence on children's behaviour. Children spend the largest part of their day at school, where the teachers can cultivate their minds and fill them with knowledge that is not only important for their career, but that can also help them grow into wise adults. They can mentor the students in many different ways, for instance through books or group activities, where they can learn to tell right from wrong. In addition, children become engaged in various extra-curricular activities at school, where they are often asked to dress up like great leaders. While doing so, the students may become curious and want to know more about these people, which could encourage the children to emulate their qualities. These positive traits may even become integrated into their own personality. Therefore, the role of schools in instilling good behaviour is a significant one.

Now read my answers and comments. Where there is no explanation, I have added the questions that show my confusion when I was reading it.

	Main idea (Points or Claims)	Support or explanation	My comment
1	Teachers can mentor children in many different ways	for instance through books or group activities	This explains <i>when</i> teachers can mentor, but not <i>how</i>
2	Through books and group activities children can learn to tell right from wrong	(none)	How will they learn this? What is the connection between books or group activities and learning right from wrong?
3	Children may emulate the qualities of famous leaders and as a result their personality may change	This will happen when they dress up in their clothes and become more curious about them	This does not seem very likely. Does putting on a different outfit permanently change our behaviour?

The explanation for the last idea takes up almost half of the paragraph, yet the conclusion that children can permanently alter their personality and behaviour by temporarily wearing different clothes still does not seem to be a valid one. In contrast, the ideas that are far more relevant to the main idea and the central topic (the role of the teacher in group activities and mentoring) are insufficiently developed or explained and remain unclear.

There is a further problem here. The writing task told us to discuss whether schools should be responsible for teaching children good behaviour and right from wrong, not just parents, but the writer has introduced a theme that is not relevant: children learning how to behave by copying famous leaders. If the writer had applied critical thinking before writing he would have realised that this idea should be deleted. Instead, by persisting with it, and explaining it over several sentences, he has gradually moved further and further away from the issue in the question. This is what happens when you think as you write, and will occur no matter what your level is, it certainly happens to me. As a result, even with the improvements we have made to language and Coherence and cohesion, this paragraph still represents band 6 Task response, which helps explain why native speakers also struggle to score band 7 or above.

🔊 Listening exercise

I have made changes to this argument to produce a band 9 version of the paragraph. Listen to a recording of it, and as you listen, fill in the blanks in on your worksheet. Follow these steps to get the most benefit from this exercise:

1. *Before listening, look at the gapped paragraph on your worksheet and try to predict the information you will hear.*
2. *Listen to the recording once, do not pause or write anything down. (Repeat if necessary)*
3. *Look back at the paragraph and fill in as many of the gaps as you can by reconstructing the information you heard – use what you know about language as well as your memory.*
4. *Listen again and fill in any remaining gaps as you listen. There is one gap for each missing word.*

Listening in this way helps you to focus on the language used. It also helps you identify problems in your own language – if you cannot ‘hear’ shorter words, such as articles and prepositions, or verb endings, then it is possible that you are not using them appropriately yourself when writing or speaking. Lower-level candidates may need to pause the recording during stage 4. Higher-level candidates can try to do this with a blank piece of paper instead of using the prompts in the gapped exercise.

[🔊 Click here to listen.](#)

Listen again while reading the completed paragraph below then compare it to what you have written.

[Click here to listen again.](#)

Schools have a great deal of influence on young children. From the age of five or six, children spend most of their day there, under the guidance of their teachers. Although we tend to think of education in terms of academic knowledge, this is only part of the picture. At school, children learn to make friends and to think independently. Through group activities, teachers can show them how to cooperate with others and play well together. Children quickly learn self-control, and realise that there is a right and wrong way to behave. In fact, if teachers did not correct poor behaviour, the result would be a noisy disruptive classroom, where learning is almost impossible. Therefore, schools inevitably play a crucial role in shaping a child's character.


Key idea: Try to structure your paragraphs using **PEEL**. Begin by making a **P**oint, which you then **E**xplain, **E**xpand, and clearly **L**ink back to the question. The point (P) and link (L) frame your paragraph. If they accurately reflect the main idea in the paragraph, they will ensure you 'present a clear central topic.'

Points to notice about paragraph structure:

1. The first sentence in the paragraph introduces the main idea (the 'central topic' here is the influence that schools have on children). The final sentence reaches a conclusion based on the evidence provided within the paragraph, shows how this is linked to the question, and makes my position clear.
2. We can see the P and L in PEEL as overall conclusions about the argument within the paragraph. The first introduces these through a general statement or point, and the final sentence sums up the main argument in the paragraph, and shows that it is answering the question – in other words, why or how it is relevant to the question you have been given.
3. Each idea between these two sentences:
 - is relevant to the question and to the stated main idea
 - helps support and explain the conclusions (P and L)
 - is clearly connected
 - is logically organised

When we can do something well, we can make it look easy. Do not underestimate the skill required to neatly sum up an argument or main point in this way – do not be fooled into thinking 'the level here is too low because it is too easy to understand.' Those who believe this continue to write in a way that makes their central ideas, conclusions, and position unclear.

Of course, there are other ways to structure a paragraph. You will find these in reading test passages, in academic journals, and even in sample answers produced by examiners for practice test books. However, these may not represent the writing we are aiming for here: a timed essay, produced under exam conditions, that will meet the test criteria, and that will help you achieve the best possible score.

Extra practice 

Go back over previous essays you have written and focus on your body paragraphs.

- Look for any pronouns you have used – what do these refer back to? Is this reference clear?
- Find the conclusions you made in each argument (your points and claims) and the reasons you gave for believing these (your supporting evidence) and decide if your arguments and conclusions are clear and valid. What changes can you make to help make them clearer?
- Look back at the first sentence in each paragraph – does it introduce one clear central topic?
- Do your final sentences accurately reflect the evidence you have provided and link back to the question – in other words, do your paragraphs match the PEEL structure?
- Is one paragraph more successful at this than another? (This is a common problem and indicates insufficient planning before writing.)
- Rewrite one or two paragraphs for practice when you have time. Make a note of any repeated language problems and grammar points, and make sure to study and practise them. For example, relative clauses, conditional sentences, modal verbs.

LESSON 9

Essay structure – Introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions

Essay structure

In lesson 8, we looked at the structure of a paragraph. Just as the first and last sentences of a body paragraph work together, a good introduction and conclusion also work together to frame your overall argument. While the former introduces the argument you will present (and possibly your position on it), the latter will summarise your argument and make your overall position clear. Within this frame, sits the main body of your argument. Each individual element is important in forming a complete, clear picture for the reader.

This lesson will look at the form and function of each of these elements. While we can analyse successful arguments made within individual body paragraphs, we cannot gauge the success of introductions and conclusions outside of the context of a complete essay. Nevertheless, there are some key features to point out, and recurring problems we can address.

9.1 The Introduction

There are no fixed rules governing what an introduction should look like or how many sentences it should contain, and opinions about this will vary from teacher to teacher. These varying approaches can lead to confusion, so this section will present some guiding principles that can help.

Although it is the first paragraph in your essay, your introduction should not be the starting point of your writing; you need to think about the question then think through and plan your whole argument first. Your introduction then briefly tells the reader what they need to know before reading your argument. It should answer several questions:

What is the topic and focus of this essay? (i.e. the context)

What is the main issue or point that will be discussed in your essay?

Problem 1 – Misunderstanding or misinterpreting the question

Many people are so keen to get started in their writing that they quickly skim read the question. This can mean that they jump to a conclusion about the writing task and misrepresent it in their introduction. The ideas in their body paragraphs then move further and further away from the issue raised in the question, compounding the problem. An even more common problem is that candidates identify only the broad general topic within the question and then write about this instead of addressing the issue raised in the question.

Solution

Do not skim over the question - take the time to read it carefully. You will never be asked to simply discuss a general topic, so keep reading until you have identified the specific issue you are being asked to discuss. As we will see in Lesson 10, while the question can be seen to have one general topic, it also helps to think about the themes within it. Consider the following example:

Some people believe that parents should be responsible for teaching children right from wrong.

Others think that schools should also teach children to behave well.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion

The general topic here is 'teaching children to behave well,' but an essay in response to this would also naturally include ideas about *parenting*, *education*, and *discipline*. These are common themes that will occur when discussing a topic like this. To give another example, if you are asked to write about problems associated with 'everyday life', your ideas are more than likely to centre around the themes of *work*, *money*, *food*, and *accommodation*. Identifying these at the beginning of your planning should prevent you from introducing themes that are not relevant, such as the theme of 'famous leaders' that the candidate discussed at length in the sample we saw in the previous lesson. On the next page, you find some more useful examples.

Examples of Common themes

Broad topics:	Common themes:
Education	students, teachers, study, resources, curriculum, pressure
Life / Living	money, family, friends, socialising, accommodation, work, free time, holidays
Health	exercise, diet, food, responsibility, medicine, hospitals
Entertainment	money, going out, arts, friends and family

Key idea: Make a note of common themes related to different topics. Using these can help you generate ideas in the test and guide your thinking.

As well as themes, you need to identify the issue raised in the question. When doing this, pay particular attention to the words and phrases that indicate the claim or argument being made. For example, **should; should always; should also; the only way; the best way**, etc.

If there are words you do not know, read the whole question again more slowly. Skilled test writers try to help you understand important words or ideas, either by giving an example, or using paraphrase, so take the time to look for these clues. For example, in the question above, the meaning of the phrase '*to teach right from wrong*' might not be clear to lower level candidates, so the second sentence uses a different phrase – '*teach children to behave well*' – to help with the meaning.

Key idea: Don't skim read the question so that you can start writing as soon as possible. Take the time to read it carefully; identify the issue you must discuss and the argument you must respond to. Look for clues within the question to help you understand the meaning of key ideas.

Problem 2 – Getting started

Some people tell me, 'I like to begin with a general statement.' The danger with these statements is that they can be so general that they are not relevant to the very specific issue raised in the question. Others begin their essays in a very rehearsed way that is often not accurate. For example, 'This is an often debated topic.' Or 'This is a controversial topic,' when in fact the issue in the question is not a common topic of conversation, or is rather mundane.

Solution

Your first sentence should introduce the broad topic to set the context for your essay. It may be general, but it should still be relevant to the question. To help with this, identify both the general topic and who or what the question is focusing on. For example, in the question above, the general topic is 'teaching children how to behave' and an essay responding to this question will need to focus on *children, parents, and schools*. Therefore, a suitable opening sentence will combine these ideas in some way. Planning your essay first will ensure that you do not introduce themes within this sentence that are not relevant to the argument you will make.

Look at the following list of opening sentences (A – D) from essays discussing whether being a celebrity brings more benefits or more challenges. Decide which one is a good opening sentence for this essay and identify any other problems (e.g. Do any of them introduce themes that are not relevant to the issue in the question? Do any of them have the wrong focus?)

- A. *It is true that when ambitious people follow their dreams, they achieve their goals at certain stages.*
- B. *It is an undeniable fact that eminent personalities are followed by almost everyone since the days bygone.*
- C. *It is argued that stardom does not only beget prosperity but also complications.*
- D. *Fame and its impact on the lifestyle of celebrities fascinates many people.*

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Problem 3 – ‘Translating’ the words in the question

Having set the overall context, the next sentence should tell the reader exactly what issue is going to be discussed. Many people already know that you should not copy this directly from the question, but then go too far in trying to avoid using every word by substituting each word with a synonym. This can feel like a bad translation and often results in unnatural language. Doing this can also change the meaning: ‘teenagers’ is not an exact synonym of ‘children’ and ‘must’ is not a synonym of ‘should’.

Solution

Although it is true that you should not copy large parts of the question, this does not mean you have to avoid **all** of the words, which may have been used because they are the most appropriate or the most natural. For example, ‘Some people’ is the most natural way to talk about an anonymous group; we don’t use ‘Numerous individuals’ or ‘humans,’ in the same way. Similarly, ‘teachers’ is a better word to use than ‘educational scholars’ and ‘children’ is more natural than ‘youths’.

Rather than translating the words in the question, aim to *interpret* the overall meaning as precisely as you can. Before writing anything, think carefully about what the question means and try to identify the central issue, then explain this idea without looking back at the question. Instead of avoiding using every word from the question, use paraphrase to express the same idea in a slightly different way. Changing the structure or form of the words in the question can help to do this. For example, changing from active to passive, or using a noun instead of a verb:

Question: Some people think that schools should teach children how to behave well.

Paraphrase: Some people believe that children should be taught to behave well by their school teachers.

Within your essay, you can refer back to this idea by focusing on the opinion rather than the people who hold it: *The view that...* or *The Idea that ...*

Problem 4 – Making an argument within your introduction

As well as explaining the issue in the question, some candidates also give an outline of their argument in their introduction. This appears to be a US or Canadian convention, but it is becoming increasingly common. Outlining your overall position in this way is done through what is known as a '*thesis statement*'. However, many people present a mini argument rather than a brief overview. This not only produces a very long first paragraph, but it also leads to repetition, because the same argument must be made in the body paragraphs, and then summarised in the conclusion. I was recently told that some candidates are doing this deliberately, because they are concerned they will run out of time to write a conclusion. The result is a confusing mix of introduction, argument, and conclusion, which means you will not show the paragraphing skills needed for band 7 Coherence and cohesion.

Solution

If you decide to include a thesis statement in your introduction, you need to:

- be fully aware of your position and main argument before writing it
- give only a brief overview of your thesis (in one sentence)
- make sure your thesis accurately reflects the argument you will make in your body paragraphs

Key idea: Always make sure you have the time to complete each element of your essay. The lessons in the Test practice section will help with this.

Problem 5 – Ending your introduction

Some candidates finish their introduction with a sentence that paraphrases the final question in the writing task. For example, '*In this essay I will **discuss these two views** before **giving my own opinion***'. This copies the words in the task almost exactly, which is not a good idea. Others draw attention to the writing process in a different way: '*I will now prove that...*' Again, this is unnecessary – your examiner knows **why** you are writing; in your introduction, they just want to learn **what** you are writing about.

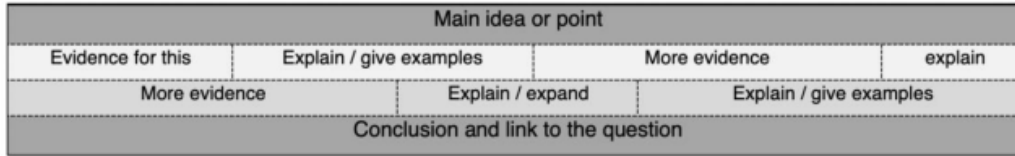
Solution

Don't paraphrase the question itself, only focus on the topic and the issue that will be discussed. Aim to write in a less personal way – keep the focus on your essay, not on yourself as the writer. For example, it is better to write: '*This essay will discuss...*' instead of '*In this essay I will discuss...*'.

9.2 The Body paragraphs

Your body paragraphs are made up of sentences that connect together to form one unit; each sentence is rather like a small building block that helps create one larger building block within your overall argument. The reader should be able to identify the central topic from your first and last sentences, and this same topic should be reflected in the sentences in between, which each serve to explain and support your main ideas.

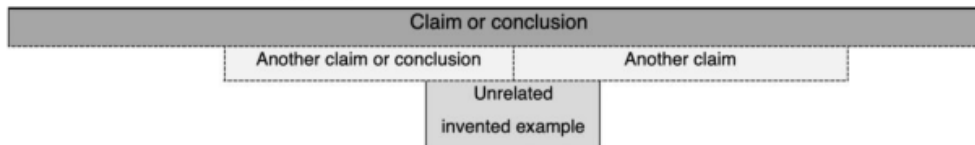
Your body paragraphs form a building block, made up of smaller building blocks connected together



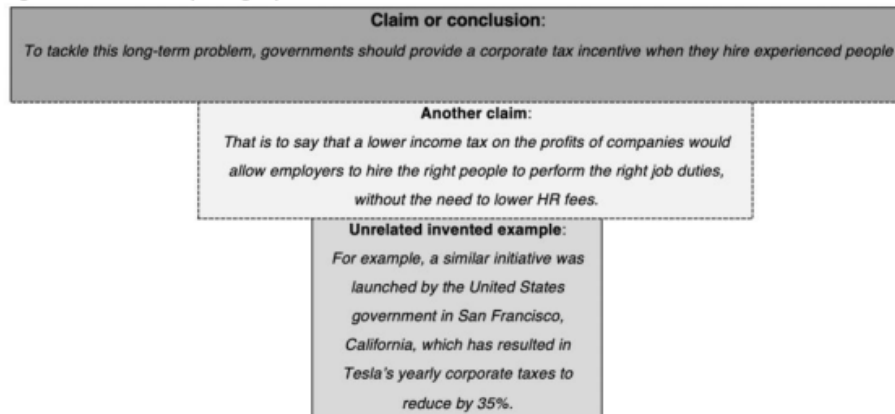
Problem 1 – A lack of a clear argument and clear central topic

In many of the band 6-6.5 body paragraphs I see, these smaller blocks (the evidence and support) are either missing or unsuitable. If you produce paragraphs like this then your argument will not stand up to scrutiny, your position will not be clear, and your reader will be confused.

A body paragraph with coherence and cohesion problems:



The above image matches the paragraph we saw in lesson 6:



A paragraph structure like this will not produce a strong overall argument – each idea will remain unclear and there is no clear central topic. Remember, the way that you structure your paragraphs, as well as the way that you connect your ideas, will determine how clear the progression of your argument is, and affects your Coherence and cohesion score.

Problem 2 – Long confusing sentences

Many band 6.5 paragraphs contain very long sentences. Some candidates believe that complex grammar is important and that this is best shown within a long sentence. To achieve this, high-level words are added and several ideas are joined together to make the sentence longer. A sentence *can* perform more than one function, but sentences that try to do too many things at once are often confusing for the reader.

Solution

Aim to communicate your ideas and your argument as clearly as possible – don't put grammar and vocabulary before Task response and Coherence and cohesion. Vary the length of your sentences to make it easier for the examiner to read, and when developing a body paragraph, try to be aware of *why* you are writing. Think of each sentence as serving a purpose within your argument. For example:

- *Introducing an argument – (presenting your main central idea)*
- *Giving a reason for believing a conclusion you have reached*
- *Showing an effect (to help support your conclusion)*
- *Explaining or expanding (to clarify your context, a key term, or an idea)*
- *Giving an example (to support your conclusion)*
- *Concluding an argument or paragraph (summing up the main idea and showing how it links to the question)*

Problem 3 – One paragraph is more successful than another

Each paragraph is just one building block within your whole essay. To score band 7 or above, you must maintain the same level of control *throughout* your essay. One of the biggest problems I see is that candidates at band 6.5 lose the overall thread of their argument. The first body paragraph presents a clear well-explained argument, but the second body is unclear or confusing, it may go off on a tangent, or simply repeat the same main points. This is often caused by beginning to write too soon.

Solution

The reader needs to be able to follow the logic of your overall argument from paragraph to paragraph. The first and last sentences should help with this, forming a map of your overall argument. These sentences are also a very useful way for you to check whether you have '*addressed all parts of the task*' (band 7 Task response). Take the time to think and plan your paragraphs carefully before starting to write.

Key Idea: If you are not sure of the purpose and function of the sentence or paragraph you are writing, then you are not ready to write. Stop and think. Only begin writing once you are clear about your ideas and how the sentences and paragraphs fit together.

9.3 The Conclusion

The conclusion of your essay should summarise the main points in your argument and make your overall position clear. It is at this point that you should also make sure to clearly answer the question in the task.

Problems

The biggest problems I see in conclusions are:

- *conclusions that are too short (often one sentence only)*
- *summarising only one idea rather than the main points in the argument*
- *not answering the question (i.e. not saying to what extent you agree / disagree etc.)*
- *introducing a new idea that has not been discussed or mentioned earlier*


This last point may come from attempting to mimic academic writing papers by suggesting possible future implications or outcomes. Other essays finish with a general statement on the topic, and you may find examples like this. Although this *can* be an effective way to finish an essay, it requires a great deal of skill and is often not managed well; doing this can result in the introduction of a new idea or theme that should be explained further.

Solution

Make sure to write at least two sentences in your conclusion. The first should summarise the main ideas in your argument. To help with this, look back at the first and last sentences in each body paragraph and summarise these. In your final sentence, make sure to answer the question you were given. In other words, make it clear whether you believe the advantages outweigh the disadvantages; whether this is a positive or a negative development; or the extent to which you agree or disagree etc. At the end of your essay, you do not need to refer to future possibilities or make future predictions, only attempt this if you are confident that you can do so without introducing a completely new idea that will seem out of place and underdeveloped.

Words and phrases I would expect to find in your conclusion are:

To sum up; In conclusion; Therefore, ; I completely agree / disagree ; In my view; etc.

Extra practice 

Look back through your previous task 2 answers and examine the overall structure of each of the following elements in your essays:

Introductions:

- Did you introduce the general topic?
- Compare your introduction to the original question – did you paraphrase the idea or translate the words into synonyms?
- Does your introduction accurately reflect the question?
- If you wrote a thesis statement, did you give a brief, one-sentence overview of your position?
- What changes would you make? Practise writing a new version on your worksheet.

Body paragraphs:

- Look at the first and last sentences of each body paragraph – do these form a map of your overall argument?
- Are they repeating the same main idea or does each paragraph cover a new main idea?
- Do the main ideas relate to different parts of the question and show that you have covered all parts of the task?
- Practise rewriting the argument in one or more of your paragraphs on your worksheet.

Conclusions:

- Do you typically write one sentence only?
- Did you sum up your main ideas or only one of them?
- Did you remember to answer the question?
- Did you write a final sentence that introduces a new idea that should be deleted?
- Practise rewriting one or more conclusions on your worksheet.

LESSON 10

DEVELOPING THINKING AND PLANNING SKILLS

10.1 Getting ideas – developing thinking skills

Thinking of ideas to write about is something that many students struggle with. Faced with a writing task about going abroad to study a new language, a Japanese student asked me, 'How am I supposed to know about that?' This way of thinking is wrong – you aren't expected to immediately 'know' the answer to the question. Try to see task 2 as closer to a maths question like this one: 'If $3x+2=14$, what is x ?' In algebra, you must use what you know about numbers and apply mathematical thinking to reach a logical conclusion about 'x'. Similarly, in IELTS, you must use what you know about life and the world to think about an issue you may not have considered before, and then reach a logical conclusion about it.

Training yourself to think

Many people tell me their mind often goes completely blank when they look at the task 2 question. To solve this problem, you need to train yourself to think in the right way. Your ideas will come from your knowledge and experience of the world, so reading widely is a good idea. Keeping up with current affairs can help counteract any lack of first-hand experience, and will also help you to understand how societies in other countries function.

Remember, writing is more difficult than speaking because there is no examiner to prompt you with a new question, or ask you to explain something that is not clear. Thus, in the writing test, you must play this role yourself. To put this idea into practice, look at the question I mentioned earlier:

Many people choose to travel abroad to learn a foreign language instead of studying in their home town.

Do the advantages of learning a new language in this way outweigh the disadvantages?

As with all complex questions, you will not have an immediate answer – no matter what your level is, the first thing you must do is think.

Using what you know to deal with the unknown

If you have not travelled abroad to study a new language, then you need to begin by imagining it. Picture yourself living in another country, without your friends and family, and without all of the things you have around you now. Is this a happy image, a sad one, or a little of both? What makes the image sad? Could you afford to do this? Write a list of any negative ideas or feelings that you have under the heading 'Disadvantages.'

What ideas would you write under the heading of 'Advantages'? If you are not sure, think of anyone you know who has done this or plans to do something similar. What are their main reasons for wanting to travel abroad? What can they find or achieve there that they cannot find at home? On your worksheet, use the prompts to help produce a list in each column.

Brainstorming

This way of generating ideas is called brainstorming, but we mustn't confuse this with planning. If we begin writing now the result will be a list of ideas rather than a clear argument. Furthermore, it is very easy during the thinking stage to get carried away with one idea. Look at my own list for the disadvantages column:
Looking back at the question, can you see something that might be 'less fully covered' if I begin writing now?

- *I would have to leave my children and my dog*
- *I'd miss them and they'd miss me*
- *Need to pay for accommodation, tuition, flights*
- *It would be expensive*
- *Travelling around might be a problem*
- *No friends nearby*
- *Can't speak the language well*
- *I don't know the culture well*

All of these ideas are about **living** abroad, but this is not what the question asks us to discuss. If we finish this paragraph with a sentence that links back to the question and 'learning a new language', that will seem confusing. This is a very common problem in the band 6.5 essays I see, and I had the same problem myself whenever I tried to write an answer after only 2-3 minutes of brainstorming.

A much more disciplined and focused way of thinking and planning is needed to achieve good Task response and Coherence and cohesion in a test situation, where there is no time to rewrite or make major changes. To address this problem, I came up with an essay planner that helps you gather relevant ideas, organise them into a logical argument, and remain focused on the task you are given. You will find a copy of it on the last page of the worksheets.

10.2 Planning

Key idea: Believing you have reached a high enough level to plan quickly or not at all is like a master chef thinking they no longer need to chop or weigh their ingredients. You are not planning enough if your plans look like this:

- *Introduction: restate the question*
- *BP1: discuss the advantages*
- *BP2: discuss the disadvantages*
- *Conclusion: give my opinion*

This is a **description** of an essay structure, not a plan. Planning in this way forces you to think of ideas *as you write*, which will never produce the level of Task response and Coherence and cohesion that you need.

Although the new way of planning I am recommending will take longer, I am sure you will find it is a good investment of your time. Like all tasks that are unfamiliar, you will be slower at first until you train yourself to think in the right way. My initial attempts took about 10 minutes, with practice I reduced this to between 8 and 10 minutes, depending on the task. I found that it made both planning and writing easier and, even more importantly, it consistently improved my Task response and Coherence and cohesion.

The planner serves as a guide, keeping you on track, a little like adding training wheels to a bike. With practice, this type of thinking and planning will eventually become second nature, and you may be able to plan without it. If you are less confident, in the next section, I will show you a simplified version that you can easily sketch to use in the test. I will also add here that, in my view, you need at least one page to plan well. I am currently trying to persuade IDP and Cambridge Assessment to increase the number of pages in the test booklet to allow for clear planning like this. In the meantime, I recommend you ask for one or two extra sheets of paper as soon as you enter the exam room.

On the next page, you will see the planner with the key features highlighted.

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>General topic:</p> <p>Focus:</p> <p>Issue to discuss:</p> <p>My initial position:</p>	<p>Themes:</p>
<p>Side A:</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p>	<p>Side B:</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p>
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p>
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points:</p> <p>Question to answer:</p> <p>My Final position:</p>	

10.3 A step-by-step guide to essay writing

Building skills not testing skills

We will use the previous essay question to demonstrate the key features of the planner. Before we begin, print off one or two copies of the planner on your worksheet to use during this lesson. Use one for your own ideas and the other to follow along with my plan if you like.

Our aim here is to build the skills needed to develop an argument. We will be using critical thinking to gather evidence and to reach logical conclusions about what the evidence tells us. We are not testing these skills at this stage, so we will go through the steps slowly. This may seem time consuming, but you will be able to work faster once we have worked on a few more essays. The steps outlined below can be remembered as **T.P.W.C**: Think Plan Write Check.

Step 1: Think

Many people choose to travel abroad to learn a foreign language instead of studying in their home town.

Do the advantages of learning a new language in this way outweigh the disadvantages?

As we saw in lesson 9, if you look at the writing task too quickly, you may make these mistakes:

- *misinterpreting the question*
- *introducing irrelevant themes*
- *addressing only part of the question*
- *writing about the general topic instead of the specific issue raised in the question*

To prevent this, begin by thinking carefully about the task. The introduction section of the planner reminds you to identify 1) the general topic, 2) the focus (who or what is affected by this?) 3) the issue you need to discuss, and 4) any relevant themes.

The general topic here is '*learning a foreign language*,' and will focus on the people who do this. The issue is whether there are more advantages or more disadvantages of travelling abroad to learn a new language rather than studying at home. This means that our essay will discuss problems and benefits associated with the themes of *learning a language*, and *living and studying abroad (and at home)*.

Some common themes related to travel and living are: *money, culture, family and friends*. Deciding on these themes now helps to:

- *guide your thinking and generate more ideas*
- *reduce the risk of introducing irrelevant themes when you are writing*
- *create useful headings and organise your ideas when planning*

Nevertheless, it is important to understand that you will be writing about these themes in the context of the broad general topic. This means that, rather than writing about '*money*', you will be writing about '*the money considerations of learning a foreign language abroad*'. Thus, when you are planning, always think, '*How is this theme relevant to the question?*'

In my planning, I often find that changing the statement in the task into a question helps identify the key issue, it can also help when paraphrasing the task in your introduction. In terms of your thesis statement, it is natural to have a quick reaction to a question, and decide on a position straight away, but I have found that my position sometimes changes over the course of thinking through my argument. At this stage, just make a note of your first reaction to the question and be ready to change it later if necessary.

Make notes to complete the introduction section of your essay planner then compare it to mine.

This is what the introduction section of my plan looks like:

Pauline's Essay planner	
Introduction General topic: learning a foreign language Focus: People who learn a foreign language Issue to discuss: Does travelling abroad to learn a new language have more advantages or more disadvantages? My initial position: I think it has more advantages	Themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • living abroad • learning a language • money • culture • friends and family

As you can see, my initial position here is that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. As a language student, I spent some time studying in Spain and France, so I feel confident that I can make a good case for this. Nevertheless, I need to reserve judgment until I have examined all of my evidence. In brainstorming, we are gathering that evidence.

At this point, it also helps to make a note in the conclusion section about the question you need to answer. This will remind you to be sure to address this at the end of your essay.

Conclusion - Summary of my main points: Question to answer: Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? My Final position:
--

Step 2: Plan

The ideas you write next are the most important of all – these will create the body of your argument. To ensure that your essay will 'address all parts of the task' (Band 7 Task response), your body paragraphs should represent the different sides or parts of your argument, and cover each of the themes mentioned in the question. On the planner, the columns labelled 'Side A' and 'Side B' are used for this.

Key idea: Those who believe that 'you must only write about the idea that you agree with' often lower their Task response score by only writing about one side of the issue. For example, with this essay, they may write only about the advantages of travelling abroad to learn a foreign language. As a result, they do not discuss the idea of 'staying in their own home' (Band 5 Task response 'addresses the task only partially'). If they only mention this idea briefly, then they will score band 6 (addresses all parts of the task although some parts may be more fully covered than others). A balanced approach to planning helps your Task response score.

As this essay will discuss 'advantages' and 'disadvantages', these will be our two sides here. In my writing, I like to begin with the weaker argument and finish with the stronger one (the one that supports my view), so I will plan the disadvantages first. Decide which order is better for your own plan.

Pauline's Essay planner	
Introduction General topic: learning a foreign language Focus: People who learn a foreign language Issue to discuss: Does travelling abroad to learn a new language have more advantages or more disadvantages? My initial position: I think it has more advantages	Themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • living abroad • learning a language • money • culture • friends and family
Side A: Disadvantages	Side B: Advantages

Making connections

In our initial brainstorming, we used our imagination to picture living in another country, and we thought in a personal way about the issue: how it affects you as a person, others in your family and so on. This is a good way to get ideas, and some of them may provide useful supporting evidence. Using our themes as headings, look back at my list of disadvantages and try to organise these under the headings of *living abroad*, *learning a language*, *money*, *family* and *friends, and culture*. Cross out any ideas that are not relevant or helpful. Do the same on your plan with the ideas you wrote in your earlier list.

'The best way to have good ideas is to have lots of ideas and throw away the bad ones.' Nobel-prize winning Chemist, Linus Pauling

Focused thinking

Next, we need to find connections between these ideas and reach some conclusions about what they show or prove. From the earlier lessons, we know that an argument is made by drawing conclusions, giving, adding, or explaining our reasons, showing the effects or cause of something, looking at contrasting ideas, and perhaps speculating about possible outcomes. Here are some useful questions to ask about the ideas you have:

- *What does this show? How? Why?*
- *What impact does this have?*
- *What else does it show?*
- *How do I know this? (i.e. What is my evidence for this?)*

Try to remember these questions and write them on your question paper to prompt you in the test.

Key idea: In order to build a clear, logical argument, you need to train yourself to think in a focused way. When you have an idea, always ask a follow-up question such as, *'How do I know this?'* or *'Why does that happen?'*

On your worksheet, there are questions organised according to our themes. Use these as a guide and write your answers as bullet points in the disadvantages column of the planner. Add other ideas or headings if you prefer. Some of the answers will be personal to you. To reach a conclusion about what your ideas show, try to think in a broader, more general way. For example:

Personal answer: *I would miss my family a lot and feel lonely.*

More general idea: *Studying abroad means living away from your family, which can make people feel lonely.*

These general ideas will be your main points – the ideas you need to make clear in your essay through your explanations, and by showing why you believe them. Keep going until you have several different main points, and enough evidence to support them and make them clear.

Remember, everyone's perspective is different, so the ideas in your list will be personal to you; they will reflect your values (what you see as good or bad, right or wrong) and they will also reflect your personal experience, circumstances, and feelings. Someone living in a hot climate, who is going to a cold country to study, may put 'weather' in the 'disadvantages' column, while someone living in a different climate might see this as an advantage. Neither is 'right' or 'better' – the issue is not the answer itself, it is whether you can make a clear case for seeing the weather as an advantage or disadvantage. If you try to invent ideas and opinions to please the examiner, you will struggle to explain them clearly.

Key idea: In task 2, there is no right or wrong answer. Don't invent ideas, just write in a clear, natural way about what you actually know about life and society.

Here are my notes:

Side A: Disadvantages

1) Money
 Need to pay for flights, tuition, accommodation, food, etc ∴ Some people might not have enough money ∴ It might be too expensive

2) Friends and Family
 I'd miss friends and family
 +

3) Culture
 I'd miss familiar things like food and the culture would feel strange
 ↓
 Could feel lonely and isolated

4) Language learning
 if you're feeling homesick it's difficult to learn or practice → This could affect language learning

Notice that I have added the symbols we used in earlier lessons to show how I will connect these ideas. I have also circled my main points, which came *from* the evidence I had gathered – I did not make a point and then invent an example for it. Circling these main ideas makes them stand out, which will help when I'm writing, but it also helps with the rest of my planning. Do the same for the main ideas on your plan.

So far, we have expanded on our initial ideas, looked for connections between them, deleted irrelevant ideas, and grouped the ideas together logically, according to themes. Each of these steps represent the critical thinking stage that is so often missed. This essential stage helps to:

- *get rid of any irrelevant ideas (TR)*
- *make sure all parts of the task are covered (TR)*
- *plan the structure of your argument (TR) + (CC)*
- *organise your ideas logically (CC)*
- *explain your ideas in a coherent way (CC).*

Key idea: If you don't take the time to critically think about your ideas, how they connect to each other, and how to organise them logically, then you will fail to make your conclusions and your thinking clear in your writing.

One central topic

Now we can think about the first and last sentences for this paragraph.

Side A: Disadvantages

Main point of this paragraph:

1) **Money**
Need to pay for flights, tuition, accommodation, food, etc ∴ Some people might not have enough money ∴ It might be too expensive

2) **Friends and Family**
I'd miss friends and family

3) **Culture +**
I'd miss familiar things like food and the culture would feel strange
↓
Could feel lonely and isolated

4) **Language learning**
if you're feeling homesick it's difficult to learn or practice → This could affect language learning

What did I show / prove? How is it relevant to the question?

These parts of the planner help you to write the first and last sentence of each paragraph

The first sentence must signal our main topic, and with an advantages and disadvantages essay question, this is relatively easy to do. We have a list of disadvantages, we were able to think of more than one, and they all seem significant, so a logical first sentence for this paragraph is:

There are several key disadvantages to going abroad to study a language.

To help with the final sentence of the paragraph, look back at the question and at your headings and themes, which neatly sum up your main ideas. Remember, your final sentence should show how the ideas in this paragraph relate to the question you were given. Can you think of a suitable way to conclude this paragraph that makes the link clear? Here is my version:

The disadvantages of studying a language abroad may interfere with learning.

These are just a rough draft; when I am writing, I may adjust this to avoid repetition or make a connection clear.

Key idea: Most band 6.5 paragraphs I see feel incomplete. It takes a skilled writer to judge when you can omit a final linking sentence like this, so it is best to include one – you will not be penalised for it. See it as an insurance policy for Task response and Coherence and cohesion.

We now need to repeat this process for the advantages column. Viewing the plan of your paragraphs side-by-side is helpful here because it means you can:

- check whether your argument will be well-balanced
- quickly compare the two sides to review your position
- gather ideas to refute the previous argument

This last point is especially important. If my position is that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, then the 'disadvantages' represent the counterargument to my argument. Look back at lesson 7 to review this idea. In order to make my position *clear throughout*, I might concede some of the points made in my disadvantages paragraph, but I should be able to refute most of them to present a strong argument in favour of going abroad to learn a language. If I can't then I will probably need to rethink my position.

On your planner, think of ideas for the next paragraph using the following steps:

1. In your advantages column, write out the same headings as before (our themes)
2. Look at the disadvantages you wrote and make a note of any relevant counterarguments – for example, what could be a relevant counterargument for the idea that you need to have money for food and accommodation etc, or that you might feel lonely? (What would you do in your town?)
3. Look back at your earlier list of ideas and ask questions to help you expand these ideas (e.g. What effect will this have? How? Why?)
4. Think about how to connect your ideas and use symbols to show these connections

When you have done this, compare the ideas you have in the two columns:

5. Are there enough ideas for each paragraph?
6. Do you need to delete or replace any ideas? (e.g. remove any ideas that are irrelevant or illogical)
7. Are the ideas in your advantages column strong enough to show that these outweigh the disadvantages? (or vice versa depending on your overall position)
8. Think of a first sentence that makes the central topic clear
9. Look back at the question. Think of a final sentence that concludes your paragraph and makes the link to the question clear.

Here is the plan for the argument I will make in my body paragraphs:

Side A: Disadvantages	Side B: Advantages
<p><i>Main topic of this paragraph:</i> There are several key disadvantages to going abroad to study</p>	<p><i>Main topic of this paragraph:</i> In spite of the disadvantages, there are clear benefits</p>
<p>1) Money Need to pay for flights, tuition, accommodation, food, etc ∴ Some people might not have enough money ∴ It might be too expensive</p> <p>2) Friends and Family I'd miss friends and family</p> <p>3) Culture + I'd miss familiar things like food and the culture would feel strange ↓ Could feel lonely and isolated</p> <p>4) Language learning if you're feeling homesick it's difficult to learn or practice → This could affect language learning</p>	<p>1) Money: May be expensive BUT can get a job</p> <p>2) Friends and family: Yes, will miss them BUT can make new friends – e.g. through work and school</p> <p>3) Culture: Yes, it will be strange, BUT interesting +</p> <p>4) Language Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to experience the culture while learning the language → a rich experience – (can enjoy the literature and films etc). • Will have access to native speaker teachers + • Living and working in the country = total immersion ↓ • able to learn the language faster + reach a greater fluency than at home • BEC will talk own language most of the time at home
<p><i>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</i> The disadvantages of studying abroad may interfere with learning</p>	<p><i>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</i> The benefits of the experience more than make up for any disadvantages.</p>

In the advantages column, notice that I use 'Yes, BUT...' to show contrasting ideas that will help me concede and refute a point, thus making my own position clear throughout. I often use 'BEC' as a shorthand for *because* – think of other shorthand forms like this that you can use when planning. Again, I have circled my conclusions or main points, which helps me see if I have enough evidence to support them and make them clear. Once this is done, I can write notes for my conclusion using the main ideas and final sentences of each paragraph to help. Do the same on your own plan.

Step 3: Reviewing your argument and position

Key idea: Looking at the evidence on each side of the argument helps you to check whether you can make a good case for your original position or whether you need to rethink your overall position.

Look at my completed plan and compare it to yours:

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>General topic: learning a foreign language Focus: People who learn a foreign language Issue to discuss: Does travelling abroad to learn a new language have more advantages or more disadvantages?</p> <p>My initial position: I think it has more advantages</p>	
<p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • living abroad • learning a language • money • culture • friends and family 	
<p>Side A: Disadvantages</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph: There are several key disadvantages to going abroad to study</p>	<p>Side B: Advantages</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph: In spite of the disadvantages, there are clear benefits</p>
<p>1) Money Need to pay for flights, tuition, accommodation, food, etc ∴ Some people might not have enough money ∴ It might be too expensive</p> <p>2) Friends and Family I'd miss friends and family</p> <p>3) Culture + I'd miss familiar things like food and the culture would feel strange ↓ Could feel lonely and isolated</p> <p>4) Language learning if you're feeling homesick it's difficult to learn or practice → This could affect language learning</p>	<p>1) Money: May be expensive BUT can get a job</p> <p>2) Friends and family: Yes, will miss them BUT can make new friends – e.g. through work and school</p> <p>3) Culture: Yes, it will be strange, BUT interesting +</p> <p>4) Language Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to experience the culture while learning the language → a rich experience – (can enjoy the literature and films etc). • Will have access to native speaker teachers + • Living and working in the country = total immersion ↓ • able to learn the language faster + reach a greater fluency than at home • BEC will talk own language most of the time at home
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question? The disadvantages of studying abroad may interfere with learning</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question? The benefits of the experience more than make up for any disadvantages.</p>
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points: The disadvantages of studying abroad may interfere with learning, but the benefits of the experience more than make up for any disadvantages.</p> <p>Question to answer: Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? My Final position: Yes, the advantages are greater than the disadvantages</p>	

Now we can check the following:

- Are there enough ideas on each side to produce a balanced essay?
- Is the organisation logical or do I need to move any ideas or change the numbering?
- Does this argument answer the question?
- Does this argument support my initial position or do I need to alter my position in my conclusion (and the thesis statement)?

I am happy with the balance here because I can refute the counterargument and make a very strong case for the advantages of learning a language abroad. More importantly, I am now very clear in my mind about my argument, my position, and my main conclusions, which will make writing my essay easier.

Step 3: Write

The completed plan can almost be seen as a rough first draft. Having finished it, you can now think about the best way to express your ideas as you write. To get started, get an overview of your argument. I can see that my essay will present the factors that have an impact on the success of travelling abroad to learn a language, so this is a nice idea to include in my introduction. Think of a similar overview sentence to help with *your* introduction.

The body paragraph plans will help you craft a clear argument, and ensure that each paragraph serves as a useful building block within your essay. Your conclusion will begin by summing up the main ideas in the argument (which you have circled) and the final sentences in each paragraph will also help with this. Again, you may need to use paraphrase or synonyms to avoid repetition. Using an umbrella term can help with this. For example, an umbrella term for the ideas of '*need to pay for flights and accommodation*' and '*it might be expensive*' would be '*financial issues*'. Finally, looking back at the planner also reminds me that I need to be sure to answer the question.

Time yourself as you write out a complete version of your essay. Follow your plan as closely as possible, and make any necessary changes to link your ideas clearly and to avoid repetition. Don't try to 'boost' the level of your language, just aim to write in a clear and natural way.

You should find that the work you have done so far makes writing easier and faster. This shows just how much of the writing process involves thinking and planning. In the past, you may have tried to save time in your planning so as to have more time for writing, hopefully you can now see that planning *is* writing.

Key idea: Planning and critical thinking are essential in IELTS. If you invest your time in this way, you are more likely to achieve the score you need. Don't cut your planning time to write – planning *is* writing.

Step 4 Check

The final stage is to check your writing. Thanks to the time you have invested in planning this argument, at the checking stage, you can focus on removing repetition, correcting language errors, and making your ideas clearer.

When you have finished, read your essay aloud to help you spot any language errors, and to make sure your explanations are clear. This is also a good way to check punctuation problems. The main problem I see at band 6.5 is an overuse of commas, so try to notice how I use these in the model answers. For the moment, try only using a comma when there is a natural pause, or when you need to pause to take a breath, when reading aloud.

Finally, count your words to get a general sense of the word-length you usually produce. This will save you time in the test. Regardless of whether you are given a word limit, try to make sure your essay is at least 250 words – I do not believe you can present a well-developed argument in less than this. In my test practice, I found that some of my essays were a little over 300 words, but it would have taken me longer than 40 minutes to make these shorter, so I have kept them at this length (this would not be penalised in the test).

🔊 Listening exercise

- Listen to my completed essay.

🔊 [Click here to listen.](#)

- Listen again and try to write down what you hear on your worksheet. If you find this difficult, use the following list of words and phrases to help. NB They are in the same order as in the model essay.

factors, cost, tuition fees, day-to-day expenses, sense of isolation, severe, interfere, defeating the purpose, resolved, rewards, mother tongue, socialise, richer, total immersion, gained, struggle, undoubtedly, enriched, invaluable


Make a list of any words and phrases you would like to learn, and compare the structure of your argument to mine. Look at the signposting you used – did you use connecting phrases well?

Compare your version to the model answer.

[Click here to see the model answer.](#)

Look at my plan again. Notice the changes that I made.

[Click here to see my plan again.](#)

Extra practice 

Look back at one or two of your completed essays. Focus in particular on the planning you did, and the effect your planning had on your argument and overall response to the task. Did you 'address all parts of the task' equally, or did you address one part only partially?

Try to identify the themes you introduced and discussed in your essay. Write them down to help you track the development of your argument and ideas then consider the following:

- Did you introduce themes that are not relevant to the issue in the question?
- Did you ignore themes or spend too little time on themes that *are* relevant to the question?
- Try to identify why you do this – is it a lack of planning or a lack of thinking about the question?

Make a new plan for one of your essays using the planner, then write the new essay and compare it to your original. Use the T.P.W.C approach from this lesson.

SECTION TWO

TEST PRACTICE: APPLYING TASK 2 WRITING SKILLS

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Introduction: How to benefit most from test practice

In this section, we will apply everything we have learned about thinking, planning, and building an argument, to create model answers for the writing task 2 questions in the *Cambridge IELTS 9* test practice book. We will cover all of the writing task 2s, beginning with General Training. The criteria and skills needed for all writing task 2 questions are the same – the difference is in the topics. Beginning with General Training means we can start with more accessible topics then progress to the more abstract or academic ones.

In the first 5 lessons, we will review the most important points, and you will be guided through the essay-writing and editing process. This will help to develop your planning and writing skills. The final 5 lessons are less guided, so that you can become more independent and confident in test situations. As well as the Cambridge test questions, I have written additional tasks on similar topics. This will help to consolidate your skills, and will have the added benefit of practising any new language you have learned from the models. We will use the planner throughout, and I recommend you print off several copies at the start of your practice. However, once you are more familiar with the format, I will show you a simplified sketch you can use in the test.

In some of the test practice lessons, we will work on answers sent to me by followers of my Facebook page. These are examples of band 6.5 writing, and the accompanying exercises will help you identify and address issues at this level. Use these to work on any problems in your own writing. If you are not studying in a class, with a teacher who can give feedback, I recommend finding a 'test buddy' to work with. It is much easier to spot problems in someone else's writing than in your own, and explaining your ideas and language choices to another student also reinforces your language learning.

Taking control and dealing with test anxiety

Test situations can be stressful, even more so when the result is as important as it is in IELTS. There are several things you can do during the practice stage to manage this. First, it is important to separate the things you cannot control from the things you can control; focusing on these will help you to feel less anxious.

YOUR MINDSET

While you cannot control the test question, you can control your response to it. The practice exercises here will train you to respond in a disciplined way to any question, no matter how difficult it seems at first. Think of yourself as building skills that will make you more resourceful – going into the test knowing you have these skills will boost your confidence and help you stay calm.

When studying for her exams, my daughter would always put a little peppermint oil on her wrist. It is claimed that peppermint oil helps with concentration. Using it during her study, as well as during each of her exams, also conditioned her to stay focused – when she smelt peppermint, she knew she was in 'exam mode'. If you don't like the smell of peppermint, experiment with another scent. Just be sure not to use one with a relaxing effect, like lavender, and to limit the amount you use so as not to negatively affect those around you. A word of caution, several years after her exams, my daughter accidentally spilt some peppermint oil in her room one evening. As a result, her body went into exam mode and she was unable to sleep for several hours!

Key Idea: Anxiety can interfere with your ability to think clearly. Feeling more in control can help you stay calm in the test. Try to develop a positive mindset – be aware that you are developing skills that will help you in the test.

WORKSPACE

You cannot control your test room, but you can control your own desk space. During your test practice, behave as though you are in a test situation. In other words, aim for total quiet, with no distractions or interruptions, and have a totally clear desk with only the tools you need to make notes and to write or type your answer. Making every test practice situation a rehearsal for the real test will help you to control your mindset within the test.

Choose your tools based on whether you are preparing for the written version or the computer delivered version of the test. Contact your test centre to find out what you are allowed to bring into the room with you. Even if I were preparing for the computer delivered test, I would still choose to do my planning on paper. However, chatting to other writers, I have found that we differ on this – while my thinking is clearer when I use pen and paper, others say that they work much better on a computer. This really is a personal choice so, during your practice, try several methods to see what works best for you.

PRACTICE MATERIALS

In chapter 10 of *The Key to IELTS Success*, I explained why it is important to use test materials written by skilled, experienced writers, and that reflect the real test. If you practise using materials you find online, you risk practising writing in a vague and confusing way, and you are not practising for IELTS, where the tasks always have a clear focus.

Try to change your attitude towards materials and resources – just because you have 'done' a test, does not mean there is nothing more to learn from it. My response to a question is different each time I answer it, so don't be afraid to do the same tasks repeatedly. The same applies to the lessons in this book. We can understand the concepts related to a skill on an intellectual level before we can apply them consistently in practice. Thus, when learning a skill, it isn't enough to read once, or practise once. Runners keep running on the same track because doing it once is not enough – each time, they get faster, fitter, and better equipped to run the next race.

Key idea: You will only improve your writing score when you can consistently apply the skills you are learning here, which will only come from repeated practice. As with any skill, you cannot master it by simply reading about doing it.

TIME

Feeling productive can help you to stay motivated and give you a sense of making progress. Set aside at least 15 minutes every day for writing practice, but aim for 30 – 40 minutes as often as possible. Adding this into your daily schedule, or adding a reminder on your phone are good ideas, but be realistic about what you can fit in. Be deliberate in your practice – make sure you know what you are focusing on and why (see chapter 2 of *The Key to IELTS Success* for more about this).

Useful practice activities

Although managing your time in the test is very important, you should prioritise the development of the necessary skills first. I tried using a stopwatch for my first test practice but soon stopped because it made me anxious and interfered with my ability to concentrate. I advise you not to time yourself too strictly until you feel more confident in your thinking and planning skills. This may not happen until you have completed 3 or more practice tests – just keep going until you feel you have reached that stage.

If you struggle with the writing stage, again, daily practice will help. It is far more useful to have frequent, short periods of writing practice than to always try to complete a whole essay. Work on body paragraphs in particular, and don't progress to full essays until you can consistently explain a brief argument using the PEEL approach (you can review this in Lesson 8). Only with repeated practice will this become natural to you.

Remember, writing is thinking we can see. Clear thinking also needs to be practised, and doing this will help with your writing. To do this, try planning an essay then giving a talk to present your argument using your plan as a guide. Each time you stumble, adjust your notes and start again. Record yourself and listen back to identify areas that still seem unclear. When I am preparing to give a talk, I have to do this several times before I can fluently and clearly explain an idea, so make sure that your expectations are realistic; it is far more difficult to explain something clearly and simply than to ramble on in a confusing way. Once you are happy with your ability to talk about your argument, write your essay. You should find that you are able to do this a lot more fluently as a result of the speaking exercise.

Key idea: Attempting to explain something simply trains you to think more logically. This is like doing mental arithmetic – if you don't force yourself to do relatively simple sums in your head, you will soon lose the ability and come to rely on a calculator. The same applies to logic, except no technology can do the thinking for you.

On the next page, you will find a list of useful practice activities.

Time	Useful activities
15 minutes	<p>PLANNING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write an essay plan. If necessary, revisit old essays and plan a new argument for a different position (for example, if you completely agreed with the view in the question, write a plan for an argument that completely disagrees) <p>WRITING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a body paragraph based the ideas in one of your plans – this is helpful even with essay questions you have done before • Rewrite the introduction and conclusion to an old essay – don't look back at your original versions, just use the body paragraphs to guide you • Practise your handwriting so that it is easier to read, or improve your typing skills • Review a model answer from this book. Read it several times, then try to recreate one of the body paragraphs in your own words without looking back. <p>EDITING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read an old essay aloud and edit it until you are happy with it – think about how clear your argument is rather thinking about language alone • Look through an old essay and focus on the vocabulary or grammar mistakes you know that you habitually make • Practise proofreading – look for typing or writing errors <p>LANGUAGE / SKILL BUILDING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read an old essay aloud and try to notice repetition of words, phrases, and grammatical structures. If you often use the same words and phrases in your essays practise rewriting several sentences in a new way to expand your vocabulary or sentence structures. • Look over one or more of the model answers in this book and focus on vocabulary or grammar. Make a note of any useful language you would like to learn • Work on weak areas in your vocabulary and grammar (see The Key to IELTS Success for ideas) • Review or repeat lessons in this book – especially those that taught you something new
30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and produce a rough first draft of an essay • Select 3 or 4 essays you have written and critically analyse them for Task response and Coherence and cohesion. Make a note of any problems and how often you make these mistakes • Do further practice on any repeated errors you have identified – review the relevant lessons in this book to help • Review a model essay from this book. Read it several times then try to recreate the same argument in your own words. To broaden your vocabulary, you can make a note of key words and phrases to use. • Combine any two of the 15-minutes activities above
40 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you feel ready, do a timed-essay – NB attempting to do this within a strict time limit too soon may demotivate you
1 hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the ideal amount of time for timed-essay practice – it allows time to settle down as well as time to review at the end. • Combine any of the earlier ideas – varying your activities and practice will help you stay motivated • Don't aim to do too much at once – build up your skills gradually and increase as you go, until eventually you are always working within the time limit of the writing test

Lesson 11: Guided Test Practice 1 – General Training Task A

11.1 Managing your time

Our first task is from the *Cambridge IELTS 9* test practice book, page 117, and is a General Training question. The question says:

Being a celebrity – such as a famous film star or sports personality – brings problems as well as benefits.

Do you think that being a celebrity has more benefits or more problems?

Comments on the task:

- This question presents a claim someone has made about being a celebrity. Some questions will refer to the people making the claim (e.g. '*Some people believe that...*'). In either case, it is the claim or argument being made that you must respond to.
- The statement includes examples to help you understand the word 'celebrity'. You can refer to these in your essay, but you do not have to – the purpose of these examples is to help you understand the context for the essay you need to produce in response.
- Always pay close attention to any descriptive words that limit the topic. The examples here make it clear that you should write about all types of celebrities, not just one specific type.

This was my first timed essay using the planner, so it took me longer than usual to produce my answer. I repeated the task several times and I recommend you do this too. It not only helped me get used to planning in this way, but also trained me to think and write in a disciplined way. To time myself, I used an app that tracks the amount of time you spend on a task. You could also use a stopwatch, so when you end one step you can click to start a new 'lap', and you do not need to pause to record your time.

Here is a breakdown of my timing for this essay (rounded up to the nearest minute), and what I recommend for your first attempts:

Steps	My Time	Recommended time
1) Think Thinking about the question, identifying the topic, the issue, possible themes, and your initial position	1 min	1-2 mins
2) Plan I. Brainstorming to get initial ideas – gathering evidence II. Thinking critically to connect and organise ideas into a clear balanced argument that supports your position	8 mins	7-8 mins
3) Write Writing out the essay based on your plan	17 mins	18 – 20 mins (take more time if writing by hand)
4) Check I. Checking your position and argument are clear throughout; checking there is one clear topic in each paragraph and PEEL structure II. Checking language - making language changes for clarity or to avoid repetition; correcting errors	7 mins	7 mins
Total time taken:	33 mins	33 – 37 mins
Time left for proofreading – typos and error spotting	7 mins	3 – 7 mins

Points to notice:

- Using the planner and the *Think, Plan, Write, Check* (T.P.W.C) approach ensures you address all of the assessment criteria. Any problems with your argument and position are addressed in the thinking and planning stage, before you start writing your essay. This means that you are clear about your response to the task, which helps to make your writing clear too. The planner guides the organisation of your essay and your body paragraphs to ensure good Coherence and cohesion.
- Checking is done in several stages. First, to improve Coherence and cohesion, and then to refine your language and check for errors (Lexical resource and Grammatical range and accuracy). Don't use this stage to 'upgrade' your language but to make your ideas clearer, avoid repetition, and correct slips.

I will take you through the planning of this essay step by step. If you already feel confident enough about your thinking and planning, just skim read, or skip ahead to 'Checking your plan' at the end of 11.2. Otherwise, print off a copy of the planner and follow along with the steps.

11.2 Thinking and planning

Step 1 – Think

Thinking about the question

- Read the question carefully. Identify the context (the general topic of the question); who or what you will need to focus on; the main issue raised in the question; and any possible themes (you can review this idea in lessons 9 and 10). Don't worry if you cannot identify many themes at this point, these may emerge later, when you are brainstorming. At the very least, you should be able to list themes mentioned in the question, such as 'being a celebrity', or 'fame'. Just be sure that any themes you identify are relevant to the issue in the question.
- Turn the statement into a question – this helps highlight the main issue, and also when paraphrasing later.
- Decide on your initial position, and identify the two 'sides' of the essay. As with our previous task, the two sides here are quite clear: the 'benefits' and the 'problems' of being a celebrity.

These are the notes I made in the introduction section of my planner. As you can see, I don't have many themes yet, but these are enough to get started:

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Focus: Famous people General topic: Fame / Being a celebrity Issue to discuss: Does being a celebrity have more benefits or more problems? My initial position: I think there are more problems</p>	<p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life / living • money • work
Side A: Benefits of being a celebrity	Side B: problems with being a celebrity

Step 2 - Plan

i) Gathering evidence for your argument

In the first stage of brainstorming, the ideas that pop into your head are not fully formed yet; they may just be key words, and not all of them will be helpful or relevant to your essay.

To get started, use the themes you identified as headings, ask questions, and use your imagination to visualise the issue. As we saw in previous lessons, with issues related to life and lifestyle, there are some recurring themes, such as *money*, *accommodation*, *food*, and *socialising*. Use these for inspiration if necessary.

- *When you imagine celebrities, what are the first thoughts or images that come to mind?*
- *What problems and benefits do you think celebrities have? (Think about the themes of money, life, and work.)*
- *Imagine being a celebrity yourself – does the idea appeal to you? Does it make you feel happy? (Why? Why not?)*

Spend about 3 minutes gathering your own initial ideas before looking at my notes. If you don't have enough ideas, keep thinking and visualising – use what you do know to think about what you don't know. Ask yourself these further questions to gather more evidence for your argument:

*If I was famous, what would my life be like?
 How would I feel if my life was like this - What would I enjoy? What would I not enjoy? Why?
 What effect would that have on me, my family, my friends?
 Why? How do I know this?*

This is what I initially wrote under my two headings. Remember, I will not use all of these ideas in my essay – these are just initial thoughts and a good place to start:

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Focus: Famous people General topic: Fame / Being a celebrity Issue to discuss: Does being a celebrity have more benefits or more problems?</p> <p>My initial position: I think there are more problems</p>	<p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life / living • money • work
Side A: Benefits of being a celebrity	Side B: Problems with being a celebrity
Main topic of this paragraph:	Main topic of this paragraph:
<p>1) Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can buy what they want – big house and cars etc (images in magazines etc.) Size – easy to clean BUT too small for families <p>2) Life / living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Live a life of luxury - They can do whatever they want - They can go where they want – attend the best events <p>3) Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They earn a lot from their profession - They can make more money from promoting products on TV and in magazines 	<p>1) Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They spend a lot <p>2) Life / living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little privacy - Paparazzi follow them - Family life and relationships suffer - Can't eat in normal restaurants etc <p>3) Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The media becomes their work – the media makes them famous BUT no privacy - No 'down time' = always working

Looking at my plan so far, I quickly realised that all of my knowledge about celebrities comes from stories in the media, and that 'the media' will feature in *both* body paragraphs of my essay. When you identify a common theme like this, especially one that is not mentioned in the question, you need to make sure that it is relevant to the task, so that it doesn't take your argument away on a different tangent. After thinking this through, I realised that 'the media' cannot be separated from the idea of 'fame', because the media creates this fame, so I added it to my list of themes. Nevertheless, I need to be careful to only discuss the media in the context of the problems and benefits of being famous.

Key idea: If you identify a recurring theme in your plan, be sure it is relevant to your task and to discuss it in the context of the issue raised in the question. For example, in this essay, I must discuss the media as it relates to being a celebrity, not simply 'the media'.

Are there any themes you need to add to your list?

ii) Making connections - building your argument

Think through your initial ideas to see whether they are relevant, how they are connected, and how they can be used to persuade the examiner that your argument and position is a valid one. My position for this essay is that there are more problems than benefits to being a celebrity. Your position may be quite different to mine – all that matters is that you can explain **why** you believe it.

Key idea: It isn't enough to 'get ideas', you also need to check they are relevant, show how they are connected, and make sure they support your argument and position.

To help you gather supporting evidence and build an argument, ask these questions:

- *What does this show? How? Why?*
- *What impact does this have?*
- *What else does it show?*

When considering the negatives, I realised that celebrities can't really *do* whatever they want, and so I crossed out this idea in my benefits column. Remember, thinking about the negatives helps you to think clearly about the benefits (and vice versa), which is why having the two columns side by side is useful.

When planning your argument, remember to:

- identify the general points you want to make – these are the main ideas you need to make clear. To develop these, think about what your evidence shows.
- check if there are any ideas in your plan that you need to delete (e.g. because they are not relevant / they are not helpful / they repeat another idea).
- think about how your ideas will be connected and use symbols to show this.
- think about your position and what you are trying to prove or show. Can you identify any points on the opposite side that you can concede and refute to make your argument stronger?
- think about organisation – do you need to move any ideas to a different heading or body paragraph?
- get an overview of each paragraph and write your first and final paragraph sentences.

This is what my notes looked like after this second stage:

Side A: Benefits of being a celebrity	Side B: problems with being a celebrity
<p><i>Main topic of this paragraph:</i> There are several benefits of being famous</p>	<p><i>Main topic of this paragraph:</i> There are also problems – it's not all easy</p>
<p>1) Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Great wealth - celebrities can buy whatever they want (images in magazines etc) - the media shows us their enviable lifestyle: cars, mansions, clothes etc ∴ <p>2) Life / living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Live a life of luxury - they can do whatever they want - They can go where they want - attend the best events <p>3) Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people want to copy them ∴ - they have influence - ∴ they can make even more money from promoting products on TV and in magazines 	<p>1) Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have to spend a lot <p>2) Life / living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, great wealth / influence BUT Little privacy - Paparazzi follow them everywhere ∴ - Family life and Relationships suffer ∴ cannot eat in a restaurant / go shopping etc. <p>3) Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The media make them famous BUT print bad stories as well as good - No 'down' time
<p><i>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</i> There are clear financial benefits for anyone who enjoys the idea of fame.</p>	<p><i>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</i> They pay a high personal price for their fame</p>

My real notes are a lot messier than this, but they still serve my purpose, and planning means that this messy stage occurs in my notes and not in my finished essay. Notice that I sometimes delete ideas or add to my ideas (e.g. I changed 'they spend a lot' to 'they *have to* spend a lot'. However, this idea got cut from my final draft because explaining it made the paragraph too long and I felt I had already made enough points about the problems of being a celebrity. Which ideas in my plan do you think I could use to concede or refute a point?

Points to remember:

- The symbols in my notes map out my argument. They show how my ideas are connected and help in the writing stage. For example, if there is a plus (+) sign then I will need to use connectors like *In addition, also, furthermore* etc.; the arrows (→) show when one idea *leads to, or causes*, another, so, these will be connected using phrases like *as a result, thus, because*, and so on. However, I can also connect my ideas through synonyms and pronouns, to avoid over-use and repetition.
- The sentences that begin and end each paragraph are very important. They will act as a frame, summarise the conclusions in this argument, and show how each paragraph is linked to the question.
- The plan helps to check that my argument is balanced and that it supports my overall position. For example, I need my argument to prove that *there are more problems than benefits to being a celebrity*.

Checking your plan

- *read the test question again to make sure you have not forgotten to address any part of it*
- *make sure you have enough ideas on each side and delete or add any as necessary*
- *identify your main ideas and the supporting evidence for these ideas - is there enough / too much? Cross out any ideas you will not need to use*
- *check that your ideas all relate to the main context: the problems or benefits of being a celebrity*
- *check that your argument addresses the question: are there more benefits or more challenges?*
- *make sure you understand how your ideas are connected*
- *organise your ideas logically and decide on the best order for them*

Now make notes for your conclusion, and think about whether you can add any relevant ideas to your introduction. For example, I added a reference to the recurring theme of 'the media' to my introduction. Try to think of any umbrella terms that will help you to paraphrase your ideas in your introduction and conclusion.

My final notes look like this:

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Focus: Famous people General topic: Fame / Being a celebrity Issue to discuss: Does being a celebrity have more benefits or more problems? My initial position: I think there are more problems</p>	
Themes: • Life / living • money • work	
Side A: Benefits of being a celebrity	Side B: problems with being a celebrity
<p>Main topic of this paragraph: There are several benefits of being famous</p>	<p>Main topic of this paragraph: There are also problems – it's not all easy</p>
<p>1) Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Great wealth - celebrities can buy whatever they want (images in magazines etc) - the media shows us their enviable lifestyle: cars, mansions, clothes etc ∴ <p style="text-align: center;">=</p> <p>2) Life / living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Live a life of luxury - they can do whatever they want - They can go where they want - attend the best events <p>3) Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people want to copy them ∴ - they have influence - ∴ they can make even more money from promoting products on TV and in magazines 	<p>1) Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have to - They spend a lot <p>2) Life / living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, great wealth / influence BUT Little privacy - Paparazzi follow them everywhere ∴ - Family life and Relationships suffer ∴ - Can't eat in a restaurant / go shopping etc. <p>3) Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The media make them famous BUT print bad stories as well as good - No 'down' time
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question? There are clear financial benefits for anyone who enjoys the idea of fame.</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question? They pay a high personal price for their fame</p>
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points: Although there are financial benefits, they come at a very high price: loss of freedom, privacy and relationships Question to answer: Does being a celebrity bring more benefits or more problems? My Final position: Personally I think there are more problems than benefits – for me, the personal costs are greater than the benefits.</p>	

Key idea: In a timed writing test, even educated native speakers cannot present a clear logical argument, and show clear progression and development, without planning first. See your plan as a rough first draft that will help you produce a much better second draft.

11.3 Writing and Checking

Step 3 – Write

In the previous lessons, I have attempted to show the mental aspect of the writing process. This begins during planning, and continues as we write. Now that your argument is planned, when writing, you can focus on explaining it as clearly and precisely as possible, choosing the most appropriate words and phrases to do this. In my essays, although my overall argument remains the same, the way that I express the ideas in it often changes as I write.

This type of rewriting is part of my everyday job, but it could be seen as a disadvantage in a test situation – writers are very rarely satisfied with what they produce. Do not feel that you must do the same, it is absolutely fine to use the same language that you used in your plan – you do not need to 'boost' your language. However, do be careful if the language in your plan is informal and personal – remember, you need to write in a formal and impersonal way. The next exercise will highlight some common problems related to this.

KEY IDEA: Candidates at the lower levels tend to think about 'boosting' their score by using high-level words and grammar. Because of this, they focus more on language than clear communication or building a valid argument. When you reach the stage where you are focused on your argument, your position, and your overall message, you will be on your way to reaching band 7 and above.

Writing style

In the introduction to this section, I recommended giving a talk based on your plan to help improve your writing fluency. However, the tone of your writing must be formal rather than conversational. Below, in red, you will find some examples of problems with style or language. Can you identify the problems? Write the answers on your worksheet.

- 1) *Given the above argument, it is clear how vital this matter is, so I feel I can go further and support a limited amount of punishment.*
- 2) *As for the advantages of living in an apartment, I will delineate them in sequence below.*
- 3) *Younger staff can perform the exact same job for less pay than what the older employees can.*
- 4) *It's important for parents to teach their kids how to behave.*
- 5) *Besides, employers must create a healthy work environment.*

You'll find the answers on the next page.

- 1) Given the above argument, it is clear how vital this matter is, *so I feel I can go further and support a limited amount of punishment.*
- 2) As for the advantages of living in an apartment, *I will delineate them in sequence below.*
- 3) Younger staff can perform *the exact same* job for less pay than *what* the older employees can.
- 4) *It's* important for parents to teach their *kids* how to behave.
- 5) **Besides**, employers must create a healthy work environment.

In the first 2 examples, the writer is drawing attention to the writing process – don't narrate what you are doing in this way. Examples 3 and 4 show some typical native speaker errors, which you should be wary of if you learn English through television or films. In example 3, these are common native speaker grammatical errors, while in example 4, 'it's' and 'kids' are too informal.

You may be surprised by example 5, because I often see the word 'besides' used in this way ('In addition' would be more appropriate here). *Besides* is more accurately used to add a final conclusive point in a spoken argument, like this one:

'I decided not to go because the air fare is really expensive. Besides, I really just want to stay here this summer.'

When used more formally, it is followed by a noun or gerund (the 'ing' form of a verb), or we can say, '*Besides this,....*'. Look at the following examples:

- **Besides paying** staff, employers must also provide a healthy work environment.
- Employers must pay their staff a fair wage. **Besides this**, they have to provide a healthy work environment.

Reading widely and choosing books or articles that are well-written and formal in style will help with this.

Step 4 – Check

Editing and correcting

All of us have to edit and correct our writing – there is no magic level where you will no longer make mistakes. When typing, my mistakes often involve hitting the wrong keys; when writing by hand, although I can think more clearly, my handwriting becomes much less neat as I write – my pen cannot keep pace with my thoughts. This is why typing out my final answers works better for me. If I were taking the paper-based test, I would need to spend some time training myself to write more slowly and legibly, and you must do the same.

Once I have written out my essay, I check or edit it in several stages. As I read through, I try to 'hear' the words in my mind. Read your own essays aloud to practise this – you will find you stumble or hesitate whenever there is a problem in your writing. It helps spot errors and repetition, and also shows which ideas are still unclear. My checking and editing speeds up as I become more familiar with what I have written and the language is made clearer. By the final stage, I can focus on the one or two sentences I feel are still not as clear as they could be.

Proofreading

This is different to editing and involves looking for smaller errors (typos, missed commas, missed words etc.). This type of error is more difficult to spot because our brain automatically 'corrects' them as we read. Even after 4 people had checked this text, another reader found typing mistakes that we had all missed. Errors like this are acknowledged within the criteria for grammar and vocabulary, which both allow for '*rare minor errors that occur only as slips*', even at band 9. As you edit, you need to be careful not to introduce more errors, which is easily done when you change a verb or a phrase. You'll find some examples like this below. If your handwriting tends to become less clear as you write, in the proofreading stage, go over individual letters that may be unclear to your examiner. You can find a post about this on my blog.

Here are some errors I spotted while editing my essay. Can you correct them?

1. *The images the media shows us shows...*
2. *celebrities are able to get earn even more money by*
3. *the negative stories ... sell more newspapers or attracts more clicks*
4. *and the loss privacy is*
5. *the riches that fame brings is a clear benefit*

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Key Idea: A skilled writer is not someone who immediately knows exactly the right way to explain something and never makes mistakes. A skilled writer takes the time to think clearly, plan, and edit in order to refine their writing and make any necessary changes.

When you are checking your writing, look out for any language errors you know you are prone to making – the fossilised errors I mentioned in *The Key to IELTS Success*. For example, do you often miss out articles, make errors with verb / subject agreement, or with the spelling of certain words? Later, when we work through problematic essays, use the language exercises to help identify your own weaknesses.

Either use your plan to write your own essay now, or wait until you have completed the exercises based on my model answer.

🎧 Listening exercise

- 1) Look back at my completed plan so that you are aware of my ideas and the argument I will make.

[Click here to see my plan again](#)

- 2) Listen to a recording of my essay. As you listen, try to be aware of my position and how I made it clear throughout. Can you follow my argument? Are my main ideas clear and well organised?

[Click here to listen to the model answer](#)

- 3) Which of the following sentences would be suitable as a thesis statement to add to my introduction? (NB you may choose more than one.)

- A. *There are more advantages than disadvantages.*
 B. *In my view, the latter outweigh the former.*
 C. *Personally, I believe that being a celebrity is a rewarding experience.*
 D. *This essay will argue that the challenges are far greater.*

[Click here to see the answer.](#)

- 4) On your worksheet, you will find a gapped version of the text to complete as you listen. This is a dictogloss-style exercise, and the aim is to use what you hear as well as what you know about language to fill in the blanks – it is not a test of listening skills. The words and phrases that are missing are all related to Task response or Coherence and cohesion; they are either making a point (to make my position or argument clear) or showing how ideas are connected, and organised. The activity will also help you focus on accuracy in grammar and vocabulary.

Try this approach:

- 1) Listen to the recording without pausing. As you listen, note down as many key words as you can. Use these to fill in some of the gaps in the text. Before listening again, you may be able to fill in some more gaps by trying to recall my argument and the points I made. Use synonyms if you need to. Each space represents a single word, so also use your knowledge of collocation and grammar to help – think about articles, tenses, and prepositions in particular.
- 2) Listen again and repeat step one until you have filled in all of the gaps.
- 3) Check your answer with the model answer in the answer section.
- 4) Make a note of any words and phrases you would like to learn. Use the plan you made earlier to write your own essay, using as many of the new words and phrases as you can.

Using model answers

Try to vary the way that you use the model answers and return to them again at a later stage. The ideas *below will help you exploit the models in this book:*

Task response:

Focus on the argument and how I made my position clear. Notice the role that language (both vocabulary and grammar) play in that. For example, the use of modals, choice of vocabulary etc.

Coherence and cohesion:

Think about the organisation of ideas and the one central idea or topic in each paragraph. Notice the use of cohesive devices, including: referencing; the use of synonyms to refer back to a previous idea; the use of connecting words and phrases.

Grammatical range:

Notice different points of grammar each time you read the model. For example: nouns and whether they have an article or not; verb tenses; prepositions; modals; relative clauses; the use of commas. Notice also the use of different sentence lengths.

Lexical resource:

Notice the use of synonyms throughout the essay. Many band 6.5 candidates try to showcase their knowledge of vocabulary related to the topic in the question, but the result is often unnatural and does not show 'an awareness of style' (band 7). In the models, you will see that it is much more natural to occasionally repeat key words.

Make a note of any words and phrases you would like to learn. To review and practise new language, read a sentence aloud, think about the meaning and the main idea in it, then try to write it using as many of the original words and phrases as you can recall.

Extra practice

- Most essays I see based on this task take the position that 'fame has more benefits than problems' but then fail to make a very convincing argument. To practise making a valid argument, and making your position clear throughout, write out a plan for an argument that is the opposite of the argument you made in your essay (e.g. showing that there are more benefits than problems).
- Write your essay when you are sure that you can make a valid, convincing argument.
- Look at the second model answer in the answer section and make a note of each of the sentences that help make my new position clear.

[Click here to see the new model answer](#)

- Save the plans you have made in this lesson and come back to them after a week or more. Re-read your plan, make any changes you decide on, then write your essay again. You may find that you change the ideas you include or the argument you make. You may also find a different way to express your ideas, which is very useful writing practice.

Lesson 12: Addressing band 6 problems

12.1 Identifying band 6 problems

The following essay is based on the writing task from the previous lesson and is a good example of some common band 6.5 problems. Fixing these should help you to identify and address these issues in your own writing. Complete the exercises on your worksheet that correspond with each image. First, look at the original essay:

Becoming a well-known person, like a popular movie icon or a sports personnel has benefits and drawbacks. Fame can bring enormous success to a person and can change one's life.

Undoubtedly, having fame, success and popularity will bring extremely rewarding benefits to a person. Firstly, it can bring honor to the celebrity's family. It is a fulfilling feeling to make your parents and loved-ones proud of what you have become. Secondly, unlike an ordinary person who earns normal range of salary becoming an iconic individual will reap the rewards financially. Having said that, this type of profession, such as becoming a movie actor, singer or dancer will have the potential of gaining huge earnings. It is a common notion nowadays, that becoming a celebrity is the easiest way to earn a lot and the short-cut to success. Apart from that, being a sports icon, such as becoming a famous basketball player or tennis enthusiast gives the people the opportunity to earn well. Michael Jordan and Roger Federer are some of the athletes that I know who are successful and have greatly established their careers in the field of basketball and tennis. A lot of people knows who Michael Jordan is. He now has his clothing and shoe line because of his fame, while Roger Federer became one of the iconic models promoting luxury brands such as Lacoste, Gucci and Chanel. Many people want to gain popularity to have a bright and secure future. Famous celebrities and sports athletes are becoming people's role model nowadays.

However, becoming famous isn't always that beneficial. There are numerous disadvantages that these well-known people encounter. First, they cannot live a normal life. They cannot just simply go to public places like for instance malls and bars because people will come after them to ask for a picture or auto-graph. It's difficult to enjoy going-out when public people admire you, unless, they make a booking or reservation in a high-end place to avoid the crowd. Second, being a public figure means that your life will be an open-book to the normal crowd. Gossip is rampant everywhere. It will be a normal for people to talk about your life and having privacy is quite difficult. Also, one must be prepared to encounter bashers, haters, and bullies. If an individual is famous it doesn't mean that person can please everybody. So, one must be prepared for all these types of dilemmas. Depression is another issue that many acclaimed people encounter. A good example of this is the famous singer, namely, Kurt Cobain who committed suicide in the 90's because fame was too much for him to handle. This is the main reason why many famous individuals feel unhappy and empty even if they are successful and rich.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings benefits and drawbacks. I strongly believe that the benefits outweighs the problems. It's just a matter of handling a person's fame in a well-balanced and harmonious way.

Length

This essay is 495 words – almost double the amount currently required. People often ask if overly long essays are penalised, but the answer is a little complex. The following list shows common problems in such essays and how they can affect your score:

- *the same ideas are repeated (lowers Task response score)*
- *some ideas are irrelevant or unnecessary (lowers Task response score)*
- *the essay appears to be unplanned (lowers Coherence and cohesion and Task response score)*
- *lacks a clear argument or position (lowers Task response score)*
- *too little time for checking and editing (increases the chance of language errors)*

Language problems

I identified 55 grammar and vocabulary problems in this essay. The majority of these (29) are connected to Lexical resource. There are problems with word choice (*enthusiast*), word formation (*mainly the use of hyphens e.g. auto-graph*), style (*bashers, haters*), and collocation (*sports personnel; gaining huge earnings; an acclaimed person*). However, the main problem is a very common one at band 6.5: the writer has approached the essay as an opportunity to show as much vocabulary related to the topic as possible. The result lowers the Lexical resource score because the vocabulary is not used 'with an awareness of style and collocation' (band 7); instead, it shows band 6 through the use of 'less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy'.

Key idea: This is not a vocabulary test or an opportunity to show how much vocabulary you have learned. Use the words you know as useful communication tools. Instead of trying to show off all of the tools you have, show that you know how to use them by choosing the right tool for your purpose (i.e. presenting a clear argument).

You can work on the language problems in the Extra practice section of this lesson. For the moment, we will concentrate on the issues related to Coherence and cohesion and Task response.

12.2 Identifying band 6 problems in Coherence and cohesion

In this version, I have corrected the vocabulary and grammar problems and highlighted 9 problems related to Coherence and cohesion. On your worksheet, try to identify the problems and suggest ways to address them. To help, think about what we have learned about connecting ideas and about paragraphs. For example:

- *Are the ideas organised logically?*
- *How are the highlighted sentences connected to previous ideas?*
- *Is the referencing clear?*
- *Does the writer use cohesive devices appropriately (band 7)?*

¹Becoming a well-known person, such as a popular movie star or a sports personality, has benefits and drawbacks. Fame can bring enormous success to a person and can change one's life.

Undoubtedly, having fame, success and popularity is extremely rewarding. Firstly, it can bring honor to the celebrity's family. It is a fulfilling feeling to make your parents and loved-ones proud of what you have become. Secondly, unlike an ordinary person, who earns a normal salary, a celebrity can reap the financial rewards of their fame. ²Having said that, people in this type of profession, such as movie actors, singers, or dancers, have the potential to earn a great deal. It is a common notion nowadays, that becoming a celebrity is the easiest way to earn a huge amount and is a short cut to success. ³Apart from that, being a sports star, such as a famous basketball player or tennis player, gives people the opportunity to earn well. ⁴Michael Jordan and Roger Federer are some of the athletes that I know who are successful and have established great careers in the field of basketball and tennis. Many people know who Michael Jordan is. He now has his own clothing and shoe line because of his fame, while Roger Federer has become a model promoting luxury brands such as Lacoste, Gucci and Chanel. ⁵Many people want to gain popularity to have a bright and secure future. Famous celebrities and sports athletes are becoming role models nowadays.

However, becoming famous isn't always beneficial. ⁶There are numerous disadvantages that these well-known people encounter. First, they cannot live a normal life. They cannot visit public places, such as malls and bars, because people will approach them to ask for a picture or autograph. ⁷It's difficult to enjoy going out when the public admire you, unless you make a booking or reservation in a high-end restaurant to avoid the crowds. Second, being a public figure means that your life will be an open book to the public. ⁸Gossip is rampant everywhere. It is normal for people to talk about your life and it is difficult for them to have any privacy. Also, one must be prepared to encounter critics and bullies. If an individual is famous it doesn't mean that person can please everybody. So, one must be prepared for all these types of issues. Depression is another issue that many famous people encounter. A good example of this is the famous singer Kurt Cobain, who committed suicide in the 90's because fame was too much for him to handle. ⁹This is the main reason why many famous individuals feel unhappy and empty even if they are successful and rich.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings benefits and drawbacks, I strongly believe that the benefits outweigh the problems. It's just a matter of handling fame in a well-balanced and way.

Answers

	Coherence and cohesion problems	Solutions (NB these are suggestions only, in the next step we will delete some of these points)
1	It is not clear how these two sentences are connected. The order is not logical.	To introduce the topic, the second statement should come first. The connection between the sentences should be clearer (e.g. adding nevertheless)
2	Cohesive devices not being used effectively – 'Having said that' is used to show contrast – it essentially means, 'Although I have just said something positive, I am about to say something negative' (or vice versa) e.g. <i>The salary is very low. Having said that, I am enjoying the work and learning a lot.</i>	Change to 'In addition' or something similar
3	Cohesive devices not being used effectively – 'Apart from that' is used to show contrast – it essentially means, 'In spite of that negative point, there is a good point' (or vice versa) e.g. <i>Apart from the low salary, it is still a good job.</i>	Change to 'In addition' or something similar
4	Cohesion is faulty – how is this sentence connected to the previous one?	This is an example used to support the previous idea – add 'For example,'
5	Cohesion is faulty – how are these sentences connected? The final sentence is not logically connected to the central topic of this paragraph.	The link between these ideas needs to be made clear. The final sentence should reflect the central topic of this paragraph and show the link the question
6	Cohesion is faulty – this seems to add a second topic sentence.	join this to the previous sentence to make one clear topic sentence
7	The connection needs to be made clearer	This sentence is showing the effect of the previous sentence. Add 'As a result' / 'Because of this' / For this reason
8	Cohesion is faulty – how are these sentences connected?	The first sentence is the cause of the second sentence. The connection between these ideas needs to be clearer e.g. adding 'As a result' / 'Because of this' / For this reason
9	Cohesive devices not being used effectively / referencing unclear – the phrase 'This is the main reason' suggests the writer is about to explain why Kurt Cobain committed suicide	This sentence should conclude the paragraph. Change to : These are some of the reasons why ...

12.3 Identifying band 6 problems in Task response

In the next version, I have addressed the Coherence and cohesion problems where possible, and highlighted the Task response problems. Task response is one of the main reasons that this essay is not band 7; in fact, there are some elements of band 5 here (e.g. irrelevant detail). On your worksheet, try to identify the problems and think about the changes you would need to make to fix them. Use the following questions to help:

- *Is there a clear point being made?*
- *Is this repetitive?*
- *Is this relevant to the question? Why is the writer telling us this?*
- *Does this help to build a valid argument?*
- *Does this help to make the writer's position / conclusion clear?*
- *Is the main idea or conclusion clear? Is there supporting evidence?*
- *Is the tone appropriate?*
- *Is the overall position supported by this argument? (i.e. Does this argument prove that 'the benefits outweigh the problems?')*

Fame can bring enormous success to a person and can change one's life. Nevertheless, becoming a well-known person, such as a popular movie star or a sports personality, ¹has benefits and drawbacks.

Undoubtedly, having fame, success and popularity is extremely rewarding. Firstly, it can bring honor to the celebrity's family. It is a fulfilling feeling to make your parents and loved-ones proud of what you have become. Secondly, unlike an ordinary person, who earns a normal salary, a celebrity can reap the financial rewards of their fame. ²In addition, people in this type of profession, such as movie actors, singers, or dancers, have the potential to earn a great deal. It is a common notion nowadays, that becoming a celebrity is the easiest way to earn a huge amount and is a short cut to success. Furthermore, being a sports star, such as a famous basketball player or tennis player, gives people the opportunity to earn well. For example, Michael Jordan and Roger Federer ³are some of the athletes that I know who are successful and have established great careers in the field of basketball and tennis. ⁴Many people know who Michael Jordan is. He now has his own clothing and shoe line because of his fame, while Roger Federer has become a model promoting luxury brands such as Lacoste, Gucci and Chanel. ⁵Many people want to gain popularity to have a bright and secure future. Famous celebrities and sports athletes ⁶are becoming role models nowadays.

However, becoming famous isn't always beneficial and there are numerous disadvantages that these well-known people encounter. First, they cannot live a normal life. They cannot visit public places, such as malls and bars, because people will approach them to ask for a picture or autograph. As a result, ⁷it's difficult to enjoy going out when the public admire you, unless you make a booking or reservation in a high-end restaurant to avoid the crowds. Second, being a public figure means that your life will be an open book to the public. Gossip is rampant everywhere. It is normal for people to talk about your life and it is difficult for them to have any privacy. Also, one must be prepared to encounter critics and bullies. If an individual is famous it doesn't mean that person can please everybody. So, one must be prepared for all these types of issues. Depression is another issue that many famous people encounter. A good example of this is the famous singer Kurt Cobain, who committed suicide in the 90's because fame was too much for him to handle. These are some of the reasons why many famous individuals feel unhappy and empty even if they are successful and rich.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings benefits and drawbacks, ⁸I strongly believe that the benefits outweigh the problems. ⁹It's just a matter of handling fame in a well-balanced and way.

Answers

Here are my suggestions:

	Task response problems	Solution
1	The point being made is not clear	Change to 'has drawbacks as well as benefits' to highlight the contrast.
2	These ideas are repetitive – the same point is being made over and over again. The claim that 'being a celebrity... is a short cut to success' is not logical – for the type of celebrities mentioned in the question, professional success is achieved before becoming a celebrity, and generally takes a lot of hard work.	Choose one idea and cut the rest to make this point once only. Remove the idea that 'being a celebrity... is a short cut to success'
3	The tone is not appropriate here – it is too conversational	cut
4	This is repeating previous information (we have already been told he is famous, which means that many people know who he is)	cut
5	This idea is not relevant to the argument being made and it is not developed – there is no explanation or supporting evidence	cut
6	This idea is not developed and the conclusion remains unclear because there is no explanation or supporting evidence	There needs to be clearer planning and critical thinking - We need to know why or how this is connected to the argument in this paragraph
7	The tone has changed here – the writer now appears to be giving advice to celebrities rather than discussing the issue raised in the question and presenting an argument.	There needs to be better planning and critical thinking – some ideas need to be cut. The tone needs to change – e.g. from 'you' to 'they'
8	This position is not made clear throughout – the writer has made a much stronger argument for the opposite view – the mention of depression and suicide is upsetting and shows extreme unhappiness	Critical thinking and clearer planning is needed – the writer needs to change the overall argument or change this position –
9	It is difficult to see how this sentence relates to the overall argument – this conclusion is unclear and is not developed	Explain what is meant by 'handling fame in a well-balanced way' and why or how this is relevant to this essay.

On the next page you can see the changes I made.

Here is the essay after all of the main issues have been addressed. The changes I made to improve Task response are in blue. The answer is still quite long at 356 words. As I have tried to show you how to improve this argument, I have stayed as close to the original as possible, and the result is now closer to band 8 rather than band 9.

Fame can bring enormous success to a person and can change one's life. **Nevertheless**, becoming a well-known person, such as a popular movie star or a sports personality **has drawbacks as well as benefits**.

Undoubtedly, having fame, success, and popularity can be extremely rewarding. Firstly, it can bring honor to the celebrity's family. It is a fulfilling feeling to make your parents and loved-ones proud of what you have become. Secondly, unlike an ordinary person, who earns a normal salary, celebrities can reap the financial rewards of their fame. **Famous movie actors, singers, or dancers, have the potential to earn huge amounts of money. Sports stars, such as Michael Jordan and Roger Federer, are also well paid. For example, Michael Jordan** has his own clothing and shoe line because of his fame, while Roger Federer has become a model promoting luxury brands such as Lacoste, Gucci, and Chanel. **This type of wealth is possible because celebrities are often seen as role models, and so people want to copy them and buy what they have.**

However, becoming famous isn't always beneficial. **First, celebrities cannot live a normal life.** They cannot visit public places, such as malls and bars, because people will approach them to ask for a picture or autograph. **To avoid the crowds, the famous are forced to visit the most expensive restaurants and hotels. Thus, they have to spend huge amounts of their earnings.** Second, being a public figure means that your life becomes an open book to the public. **Gossip is rampant, and people enjoy talking about the lives of celebrities, so it is difficult for them to have any privacy.** Depression is another issue that many famous people encounter. A good example of this is the singer Kurt Cobain, who committed suicide in the 90's because fame was too much for him to handle. **Thus, famous people can** feel unhappy and empty even if they are successful and rich.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings financial benefits, **there are even more significant drawbacks. Only those who manage to handle the problems associated with fame, and stay well-balanced, can truly reap its rewards.**

This answer can still be improved through the use of more natural language (at times it is repetitive and wordy) and a more fully developed argument (e.g. cutting some ideas – there is too much emphasis on specific sports stars, and I would cut the reference to depression and suicide.)


Here is a Band 9 version of this essay. Reading the band 8 and band 9 versions aloud will help to see the difference – notice the language used and the clearer argument being made.

Fame undoubtedly changes a person's life. Nevertheless, such changes are not always for the better; in fact, for all professions, from movie stars to sports personalities, being a celebrity has challenges as well as benefits.

Undoubtedly, fame can be extremely rewarding. Firstly, there is the sense of personal fulfillment that must come from making your family proud of what you have achieved. Secondly, celebrities can reap enormous financial rewards from their fame. On top of their fees, the famous have the potential to earn huge amounts of money from promoting luxury brands. A type of wealth that is possible because celebrities are often seen as role models, and so people want to copy them and buy what they have. Being a focus for the world's attention is clearly lucrative.

However, achieving this status is not without its problems. First, celebrities can no longer live a normal life. If they visit public places, such as malls and bars, people will crowd around them demanding a picture or autograph. To avoid this, the famous are forced to live in gated communities, visit the most expensive restaurants and hotels, and hire personal body guards for themselves and their families. Second, being a public figure means that your life is like an open book. The public love to gossip about the lives of celebrities, so it is almost impossible for them to have any privacy. As a result, the famous can be made to feel isolated and under siege.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings huge financial benefits, there are even more significant drawbacks. In my view, only those who manage to handle the problems associated with fame, can truly be said to reap its rewards. (283 words)

Extra practice 

- Make a list of any language you would like to learn from the exercises in this lesson. Write a new version of your essay using as many of these words and phrases as possible. When you are happy with your new essay, photocopy it and use White out or correction fluid to cover the new words and phrases. After a week or so, go back and try to fill in the blanks.
- Go back over any of your previous essays that are longer than 300 words. Read your essay aloud – can you see any of the problems mentioned at the start of this lesson?
- On the next page, I have highlighted the 55 grammar and vocabulary problems in the original essay. To practise editing, try to match the errors (1 – 55) with those listed in the table on your worksheet. Correct as many as you can. To make the task more manageable, work on just one or two types of error at a time, or focus on just one paragraph. When you have finished, look at the answers on the last page of this lesson.
- If you struggle to identify any of the problems, it may be a sign that you make the same mistakes in your writing. Look carefully at the corrected version in the answers and make a note of any language points you need to study.
- The writer of this essay had tried to use as many synonyms connected to the topic of fame as possible, which lowers the score instead of boosting it. Look back through your previous essays to see if you also try to do this. Choose 2 or 3 of the most natural alternatives (i.e. the more common ones) and replace any words you are less sure about. For example, compare the words and phrases used by this writer to the more natural ones I used in my essay: *a celebrity, celebrities, the famous, a public figure, famous people*.
- When you have finished, look back through some of your previous essays to see if you make any of the same problems. Can you identify and fix any of your errors now?

Grammar and vocabulary problems:

Becoming a well-known person, ¹like a popular movie ²icon or a sports ³personnel has benefits and drawbacks. Fame can bring enormous success to a person and can change one's life.

Undoubtedly, having fame, success and popularity ⁴will ⁵bring extremely rewarding benefits to a ⁶person. Firstly, it can bring honor to the celebrity's family. It is a fulfilling feeling to make your parents and loved-ones proud of what you have become. Secondly, unlike an ordinary ⁷person who earns ⁸normal ⁹range of salary ¹⁰becoming ¹¹an iconic individual ¹²will ¹³reap the rewards financially. Having said that, ¹⁴this type of profession, such as ¹⁵becoming ¹⁶a movie actor, singer or dancer ¹⁷will have the ¹⁸potential of ¹⁹gaining huge earnings. It is a common notion nowadays, that becoming a celebrity is the easiest way to earn ²⁰a lot and ²¹the ²²short-cut to success. Apart from that, being a sports ²³icon, such as becoming a famous basketball player or tennis ²⁴enthusiast gives ²⁵the people the opportunity to earn well. Michael Jordan and Roger Federer are some of the athletes that I know who are successful and ²⁶have greatly established their careers in the field of basketball and tennis. ²⁷A lot of people ²⁸knows who Michael Jordan is. He now has ²⁹his clothing and shoe line because of his fame, while Roger Federer ³⁰became ³¹one of the iconic models promoting luxury brands such as Lacoste, Gucci and Chanel. Many people want to gain popularity to have a bright and secure future. Famous celebrities and sports athletes are becoming ³²people's ³³role model nowadays.

However, becoming famous isn't always ³⁴that beneficial. There are numerous disadvantages that these well-known people encounter. First, they cannot live a normal life. They cannot ³⁵just simply go to public places ³⁶like for instance malls and bars because people will ³⁷come after them to ask for a picture or ³⁸auto-graph. It's difficult to enjoy ³⁹going-out when ⁴⁰public people admire you, unless, ⁴¹they make a booking or reservation in a ⁴²high-end place to avoid ⁴³the crowd. Second, being a public figure means that your life ⁴⁴will be an ⁴⁵open-book to ⁴⁶the normal crowd. Gossip is rampant everywhere. It ⁴⁷will be ⁴⁸a normal for people to talk about your life and ⁴⁹having privacy is quite difficult. Also, one must be prepared to encounter ⁵⁰bashers, haters, and bullies. If an individual is famous it doesn't mean that person can please everybody. So, one must be prepared for all these types of ⁵¹dilemmas. Depression is another issue that many ⁵²acclaimed people encounter. A good example of this is the famous singer ⁵³namely, Kurt Cobain who committed suicide in the 90's because fame was too much for him to handle. This is the main reason why many famous individuals feel unhappy and empty even if they are successful and rich.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings benefits and ⁵⁴drawbacks. I ⁵⁵strongly believe that the benefits ⁵⁶outweighs the problems. It's just a matter of handling ⁵⁷a person's fame in a well-balanced and ⁵⁸harmonious way.

Answers

NB some errors appear in more than one row.

Type of Grammatical error	Example/s (nos 1-55)
Incorrect tense / modal verb	4, 11, 16, 43, 46
Verb / subject problems	13, 20, 27, 54
preposition	17, 48
Word order	48
Adjective / adverb problem	25
Extra word/s	9, 14, 52, 55
Articles / singular / plural nouns	7, 15, 20, 24, 30, 32, 42, 47
Pronoun use	28, 40
Punctuation (commas etc)	6, 52, 53
Type of vocabulary error	Example/s
Incorrect Word choice/ collocation problem	2, 3, 10, 12, 18, 22, 23, 36, 39, 41, 44, 45, 50, 51, 56
Too informal / style	1, 19, 26, 33, 34, 35, 41, 49
Extra word/s	5, 8, 31
Word form, (spelling, hyphen use etc.)	21, 37, 38, 44

Word choice and informal language / style are particular problems for this writer. The attempt to use as many synonyms as possible associated with fame created many of these problems as it resulted in unnatural language. Corrections are shown in blue:

Becoming a well-known person, **such as** a popular movie **star** or a sports **personality**, has benefits and drawbacks. Fame can bring enormous success to a person and can change one's life.

Undoubtedly, having fame, success and popularity **is extremely rewarding**. Firstly, it can bring honor to the celebrity's family. It is a fulfilling feeling to make your parents and loved-ones proud of what you have become. Secondly, unlike an ordinary **person, who** earns **a normal salary**, **a celebrity can reap the financial rewards of their fame**. Having said that, **people in this type of profession**, such as **movie actors, singers, or dancers**, **have the potential to earn a great deal**. It is a common notion nowadays, that becoming a celebrity is the easiest way to earn **a huge amount** and **is a short cut to success**. Apart from that, being a sports **star**, such as a famous basketball player or tennis **player**, gives **people** the opportunity to earn well. Michael Jordan and Roger Federer are some of the athletes that I know who are successful and **have established great careers** in the field of basketball and tennis. **Many** people **know** who Michael Jordan is. He now has **his own** clothing and shoe line because of his fame, while Roger Federer **has become a model promoting** luxury brands such as Lacoste, Gucci and Chanel. Many people want to gain popularity to have a bright and secure future. Famous celebrities and sports athletes are becoming **role models** nowadays.

However, becoming famous isn't always beneficial. There are numerous disadvantages that these well-known people encounter. First, they cannot live a normal life. They cannot **visit** public places, **such as** malls and bars, because people will **approach** them to ask for a picture or **autograph**. It's difficult to enjoy **going out** when **the public** admire you, unless **you** make a booking or reservation in a high-end **restaurant** to avoid **the crowds**. Second, being a public figure means that your life **will** be an **open book to the public**. Gossip is rampant everywhere. It **is normal** for people to talk about your life and **it is difficult for them to have any privacy**. Also, one must be prepared to encounter **critics** and bullies. If an individual is famous it doesn't mean that person can please everybody. So, one must be prepared for all these types of **issues**. Depression is another issue that many **famous** people encounter. A good example of this is the famous singer **Kurt Cobain, who** committed suicide in the 90's because fame was too much for him to handle. This is the main reason why many famous individuals feel unhappy and empty even if they are successful and rich.

To sum up, whilst being famous brings benefits and **drawbacks**, I **strongly** believe that the benefits **outweigh** the problems. It's just a matter of **handling fame** in a well-balanced and way.

Lesson 13 - Guided Test Practice 2 – General Training Task B

13.1 Thinking and Planning

To vary your practice a little, and to help review the PEEL structure, this lesson will take a slightly different approach to producing our next model answer. Nevertheless, we will still follow the T.P.W.C steps.

Step 1 – Think

This test question is from *Cambridge IELTS 9*, page 130. The question says:

Some people think that the teenage years are the happiest times of most people's lives. Others think that adult life brings more happiness, in spite of greater responsibilities.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Comments on the task

- This question presents two opposing sides of an argument that you must discuss: an argument, and its counterargument. You are also asked to give your own opinion and, as always, you will need to make your own position clear throughout. This means that, just as with the previous essays, you will decide on your position, discuss both sides of the argument (making your own position clear), and then present your own opinion. Remember to write, 'Give my own opinion' in the conclusion section of the planner.
- I generally include a thesis statement in the introduction of essays like this one, and I find that my answers tend to be a little longer, because of the need to discuss 2 arguments and give my own opinion. Even so, aim to write no more than 350 words if possible.
- Remember, you are not being asked to discuss *the people* mentioned in the question, or why they believe these things; your focus should only be on the arguments that their views represent.
- With this question, many people see the two sides as 'happiness in teenagers' and 'happiness in adults,' but the task asks us to take into account the 'greater responsibilities' that adults have, so make sure to include this in your plan.
- When you need to discuss two separate arguments, it helps to divide each column up into 'pros' and 'cons'. Thus, we will brainstorm 'the pros and cons of being a teenager', and 'the pros and cons of adult life, considering its greater responsibilities'.

If you have a 'test buddy', make notes and then take turns presenting and explaining your ideas to each other. To check that you understand your partner's argument, summarise it and repeat it back to them, saying 'So, you think that...., is that right?'

Step 2 – Plan

Print off a copy of the planner and write a plan for this question. Aim to spend about 10 minutes doing this, but don't worry too much if you take a little longer.

Points to remember

- Identify useful themes and use these as headings. If you get stuck for ideas, use key words in the question to create these, and remember the recurring themes when writing about life: *accommodation, money, work, free time, socialising*.
- Asking questions like, 'Why?' 'How?' Or 'How do you know this?' will help you to gather supporting evidence.
- Asking further questions about your evidence will help you reach a conclusion and form your main ideas. For example:

- *What does this show?*
- *What effect does this have?*
- *How does that make teenagers / adults feel?*

- Comparing the ideas on both sides helps guide your thinking. For example, if you have written notes about 'money' in your teenager column, what corresponding idea could you write down in the 'adults' column?
- When you have enough ideas for your argument, try to think of useful umbrella terms you can use to paraphrase these ideas in your introduction and conclusion.

When you have finished your plan, reflect on your planning skills by answering these questions:

Body paragraphs:

- *Do you have enough ideas on each side of the argument to present a balanced essay?*
- *Are your ideas logically organised?*
- *Do you have enough supporting evidence for your conclusions?*
- *Have you deleted any repetitive, irrelevant, or unsupported ideas?*
- *Are there any ideas you can concede and refute to make your position clear throughout and strengthen your overall argument?*
- *Look at the notes you have made for the first and last sentence of each paragraph. Will these help the examiner to identify 'a clear central topic'? Do they accurately reflect the main ideas within each paragraph?*
- *Will your final sentence show the examiner how your paragraph is relevant to the question?*

Introduction and conclusion:

- *Can you introduce the general topic and the main issue?*
- *Does your argument support your position? (In other words, will your body paragraphs make your position clear throughout?)*
- *Does your argument fully answer the question?*

Step 3 – Write

When you are happy with your plan, and have added symbols showing how all of your ideas are connected, write only the body paragraphs for your essay. Try to spend less than 10 minutes on each paragraph if you can. We will return to these later, once we have reviewed the PEEL structure.

13.2 Paragraphing skills – reviewing PEEL

In the introduction to this section, I made the point that we can generally understand a theory before we are able to consistently apply it in practice. I often see proof of this in my test writing work. When I am working on a test that is new to me, and trying to apply unfamiliar guidelines, the feedback on my early attempts often highlights mistakes that I have tried very hard not to make, and which seem obvious once they are pointed out. Similarly, people will send me practice essays telling me they have followed the PEEL format (even labelling their sentences, 'This is my topic sentence, this is my explanation,' etc.) but the sentences do not perform the function the writer was aiming for. This highlights the benefit of working with a partner if you can, because it is very difficult to see your own writing as the reader will see it.

If it is managed well, the PEEL structure helps create a logically organised paragraph with a clear central topic, and main ideas that are extended, supported, and relevant to the question, which are all features of bands 7 to 9. The sentences act as building blocks within the paragraph, and will:

- make a **P**oint
- **E**xplain or **E**xpand on that point (e.g. by adding more; showing contrast; showing the effect etc.)
- give an **E**xample to support the point
- **L**ink it back to the question.

However, the sentences must actually perform these functions in order to form an effective paragraph. If they do not, the PEEL structure will not help to improve your score. The paragraphs below show why.

Problem 1

This paragraph is from an essay discussing whether there are more advantages or more disadvantages to living in an apartment compared to living in a house. The first sentence (often called the topic sentence) should present the central topic of the paragraph. Read the paragraph and decide whether the first sentence achieves this purpose. What other problems can you identify?

As for the advantages of living in an apartment, I will list them in sequence below. Firstly, being smaller than houses, apartments tend to be much easier to keep clean and renovate. In fact, the smaller a house is, the easier its restoration is. This is particularly helpful if you are busy with work and other chores and thus not interested in maintenance. Secondly, house prices, as a general rule, increase with their size. The fact is that nearly all apartments are smaller than houses. In addition, taxes are set in accordance with the size of a building. To put it another way, the smaller the area of a house is, the less tax you pay, and thus apartments generally cost people far less than houses.

As for the advantages of living in an apartment, I will list them in sequence below. Firstly, being smaller than houses, apartments tend to be much easier to keep clean and renovate. In fact, the smaller a house is, the easier its restoration is. This is particularly helpful if you are busy with work and other chores and thus not interested in maintenance. Secondly, house prices, as a general rule, increase with their size. The fact is that nearly all apartments are smaller than houses. In addition, taxes are set in accordance with the size of a building. To put it another way, the smaller the area of a house is, the less tax you pay, and thus apartments generally cost people far less than houses.

Points to notice:

- In the first sentence, this writer is commenting on the writing process. As we saw in lesson 11.3, you should avoid doing this – don't say what you are going to do, just do it.
- A better first sentence would be: *There are several advantages to living in an apartment.* However, although this now *looks* like a topic sentence, we cannot say that it performs this function, because it does not reflect the central topic of the paragraph: the sentences following this jump between discussing both apartments and houses.
- This reveals a second problem: organisation. This is an essay discussing the advantages and disadvantages of A) living in an apartment, and B) living in a house. The writer does not 'logically organise information', because some of the advantages of houses are discussed within the paragraph that claims to be about the advantages of apartments.
- Using the PEEL structure cannot make up for a lack of thinking and planning. Although this paragraph does attempt to make a Point and then Explain and Expand on it, this point is a rather simple one, and can be summed up in one sentence: *Apartments are smaller than houses and so they are cheaper and easier to clean.* There is no need to explain this idea in detail, which is what the writer has attempted to do here. The result is a repetition of the same idea – size is mentioned 6 times in this paragraph and is a recurring theme.
- We cannot fix this paragraph because more thinking and planning is needed, and this should have been done *before* writing. It would have been better to discuss the 'pros' and then the 'cons' of living in an apartment, in this way, the writer could argue that small accommodation is not always a benefit and this may have helped him to think of more themes in addition to cost and size.

With better planning and thinking beforehand, this writer would have brainstormed ideas like this:	Instead of this:
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>Side A: Advantages and disadvantages of living in an apartment</p> <p>PROS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Size – small = easy to clean 2) Cheaper to buy and to renovate 3) Location – tend to be in city centres, useful for work <p>CONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Size – easy to clean BUT no garden 5) Location – good for work BUT bad for families 6) little space for families with children </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>Side A: Advantages of living in an apartment</p> <p>PROS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Size – small = easy to clean 2) Cheaper to buy and to renovate </div>

PEEL Problem 2

It is important to remember that the main purpose of each paragraph is to present one argument that will form part of a bigger argument (your essay). To achieve this, your reasoning must be clear and logical. The following paragraph is from an essay in response to a question in *The Official Cambridge Guide to IELTS* about whether it is better to work for one organisation all of your life or to work for different organisations. Read the paragraph and decide whether the conclusions are clear, in particular, the conclusion that, 'This might result in laziness and irresponsibility.'

It is an undeniable fact that if people frequently change their workplaces it will have a huge negative impact on their professional prospects. It usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to new working environment and each time an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. Stress in such cases is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common. This might result in laziness and irresponsibility, the traits that are always unwelcomed by employers. The worst thing about this is when a person wanting to work for many companies loses his chances of being recruited. One of my friend told me about the story of a man who went to UAE to work but as he changed his place of work too much started being rejected in new places and as a result, he had to come back altogether.

To help focus on the problems here as well as the PEEL structure, look at the comments highlighted in the following five images. On your worksheet, rewrite the paragraph making the suggested changes to improve the structure and argument, and to ensure that the sentences perform the required function.

1) Making a Point – making the central topic clear

<p>It is an undeniable fact that if people frequently change their workplaces it will have a huge negative impact on their professional prospects. It usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to new working environment and each time an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. Stress in such cases is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common. This might result in laziness and irresponsibility, the traits that are always unwelcomed by employers. The worst thing about this is when a person wanting to work for many companies loses his chances of being recruited. One of my friend told me about the story of a man who went to UAE to work but as he changed his place of work too much started being rejected in new places and as a result, he had to come back altogether.</p>	<p>Pauline Cullen Is this an undeniable fact?</p> <p>Is this whole paragraph about 'job prospects'?</p> <p>Rephrase this sentence so that it introduces the central topic in a clear way.</p>
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2) Expanding and explaining – improving cohesion

It is an undeniable fact that if people frequently change their workplaces it will have a huge negative impact on their professional prospects. It usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to new working environment and each time an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. Stress in such cases is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common. This might result in laziness and irresponsibility, the traits that are always unwelcomed by employers. The worst thing about this is when a person wanting to work for many companies loses his chances of being recruited. One of my friend told me about the story of a man who went to UAE to work but as he changed his place of work too much started being rejected in new places and as a result, he had to come back altogether.

Pauline Cullen
 These are good points – they Explain and Expand on the negative effects of changing jobs frequently – but there is a cohesion problem.
 How is the first sentence connected to the topic sentence?
 How is the second sentence connected?
 Think of a way to clearly show how these ideas are connected.

It is an undeniable fact that if people frequently change their workplaces it will have a huge negative impact on their professional prospects. It usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to new working environment and each time an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. Stress in such cases is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common. This might result in laziness and irresponsibility, the traits that are always unwelcomed by employers. The worst thing about this is when a person wanting to work for many companies loses his chances of being recruited. One of my friend told me about the story of a man who went to UAE to work but as he changed his place of work too much started being rejected in new places and as a result, he had to come back altogether.

Pauline Cullen
 Does the evidence support this idea? Is this a logical effect of feeling stressed and making mistakes?
 The reference to employers offers a nice perspective. Make the previous sentence longer by adding something about employers (how do you think they would feel about employees making mistakes?) Use a relative clause and 'which'.

3) Using referencing clearly

It is an undeniable fact that if people frequently change their workplaces it will have a huge negative impact on their professional prospects. It usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to new working environment and each time an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. Stress in such cases is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common. This might result in laziness and irresponsibility, the traits that are always unwelcomed by employers. The worst thing about this is when a person wanting to work for many companies loses his chances of being recruited. One of my friend told me about the story of a man who went to UAE to work but as he changed his place of work too much started being rejected in new places and as a result, he had to come back altogether.

Pauline Cullen
 What does 'this' refer back to?
 The writer intended to refer back to the first sentence. What changes do you need to make to ensure that the reference is clear? (You can review this in lesson 4)

4) Giving an example and Linking back to the question.

It is an undeniable fact that if people frequently change their workplaces it will have a huge negative impact on their professional prospects. It usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to new working environment and each time an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. Stress in such cases is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common. This might result in laziness and irresponsibility, the traits that are always unwelcomed by employers. The worst thing about this is when a person wanting to work for many companies loses his chances of being recruited. One of my friend told me about the story of a man who went to UAE to work but as he changed his place of work too much started being rejected in new places and as a result, he had to come back altogether.

Pauline Cullen
 This example supports the previous idea but it is not a good way to finish the paragraph, which feels incomplete. Make the example less personal (i.e. without saying 'One of my friends told me..') (NB The writer used the singular, which is a common mistake)
 Add a new sentence to complete this paragraph and show the link to the question.

When you have completed the paragraph, compare your version to the one on the next page.

Answer

Here is my version with the changes highlighted:

If people frequently change their workplace this can have several negative effects. When we change jobs, it usually takes a longer time than expected to adjust to the new work environment and, each time this happens, an employee has to set new goals and start from the very beginning. As a result, stress is usually unavoidable and mistakes are common, which is unlikely to be welcomed by employers. However, the worst thing about changing jobs frequently is that it can reduce your chance of being recruited again in the future. For example, a friend of mine went to the UAE to work but, as he changed jobs so much, he started being rejected in new places and, as a result, he had to come back. This shows that constantly changing jobs can have an impact on job prospects.

Step 4 – Check

To apply all of these ideas to you writing, look back at the body paragraphs you wrote at the end of 13.1. Look at each sentence and decide what function it has. For example, does it:

- *Make a **P**oint that presents the clear central topic of your paragraph?*
- ***E**xplain an idea?*
- ***E**xpand on an idea?*
- *Give an **E**xample to support an idea?*
- *Link the paragraph back to the question?*

Make any necessary changes to your paragraphs, or plan your argument again and then rewrite the paragraphs. If possible, ask a study partner to check it for you. Ask them to identify the function of each sentence using the questions above. Complete your essay by writing your introduction and conclusion.

Key idea: You will need to practise using the PEEL structure often before you can consistently produce clear, effective paragraphs. Try to get feedback from someone else. Check that your sentences do what you want them to do, and that your ideas are clear, logical, and well supported.

13.3 Language building

Below is the plan I used for the body paragraphs in my essay. In many ways, an essay plan is personal, so don't worry if you can't follow *all* of my ideas. The aim is to show you how detailed they should be if you want to achieve your purpose. It is more important for you to be able to follow the plan of own argument.

When writing, I do not use all of the ideas in my plan, Decide which ideas you would include, then try to write one or two body paragraphs based on these. Make sure to use the PEEL structure.

Side A: Teenage years + happiness	Side B: Adulthood – responsibilities and happiness
<i>Main topic of this paragraph:</i> The teenage perspective	<i>Main topic of this paragraph:</i> The adult perspective
<p>PROS</p> <p>1) living at home ∴ no expenses – parents meet all needs – few responsibilities +</p> <p>2) School - Spend all day with other teens → good friends, always appear to be having fun +</p> <p>3) Yes, lots of holidays and free time BUT no money!</p> <p>CONS</p> <p>4) Growing older / development – a time of great change – still developing physically ∴ not yet mature → teens hurt each other (bullying, peer pressure, get into trouble) +</p> <p>5) Academic pressure (exams / course choices) ∴ not a totally stress-free time</p>	<p>CONS</p> <p>1) Living independently – responsibilities in terms of accommodation – need to pay bills +</p> <p>2) Job / work responsibilities too +</p> <p>3) Less free time / fewer holidays ∴ much more stress</p> <p>PROS</p> <p>4) Have money ∴ can build a family and home +</p> <p>5) Building a career → personal satisfaction (a different kind of happiness)</p> <p>6) Maturity – adulthood is a much longer period of time – we are mature enough to solve problems and make changes (change job, move house etc)</p>
<i>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</i> From the outside this period can seem happier than it is in reality.	<i>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</i> In spite of the problems – a different type of happiness is possible in adulthood

🔊 Listening exercises

- 1) Listen to a recording of the first body paragraph in my essay. As you listen, note down any language or expressions that are different to your version. Listen again and try to recreate my paragraph using the notes you made to help.

[🔊 Click here to listen to the first body paragraph.](#)

- 2) Do the same with the recording of the second body paragraph.

[🔊 Click here to listen to the second body paragraph.](#)

- 3) What do you think my overall position is?

Now that you have the body paragraphs, look at the complete plan for my essay and write an appropriate introduction and conclusion. Compare your answer to the model answer on the next page.

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>Focus: People in general General topic: Happiness at different stages in life Issue to discuss: Are people happiest when they are teenagers or when they are adults and have more responsibilities?</p> <p>My initial position: I think adulthood is happier</p>	
<p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life / living • responsibilities • work / school • Free time • Money • Growing older 	
Side A: Teenage years + happiness	Side B: Adulthood – responsibilities and happiness
<p>Main topic of this paragraph: The teenage perspective</p> <p>PROS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) living at home ∴ no expenses – parents meet all needs – few responsibilities + 2) School - Spend all day with other teens → good friends, always appear to be having fun + 3) Yes, lots of holidays and free time BUT no money! <p>CONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Growing older / development – a time of great change – still developing physically ∴ not yet mature → teens hurt each other (bullying, peer pressure, get into trouble) + 5) Academic pressure (exams / course choices) ∴ not a totally stress-free time 	<p>Main topic of this paragraph: The adult perspective</p> <p>CONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Living independently – responsibilities in terms of accommodation – need to pay bills + 2) Job / work responsibilities too + 3) Less free time / fewer holidays ∴ much more stress <p>PROS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4) Have money ∴ can build a family and home + 5) Building a career → personal satisfaction (a different kind of happiness) 6) Maturity – adulthood is a much longer period of time – we are mature enough to solve problems and make changes (change job, move house etc)
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>From the outside this period can seem happier than it is in reality.</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>In spite of the problems – a different type of happiness is possible in adulthood</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>Summary of main points: My opinion: Teenagers can appear happy but it is easy to forget the stress of this time and lack of freedom. YES, adults have responsibilities – BUT over time they can find peace and happiness.</p> <p>Question to answer: Give my own opinion</p> <p>My Final position: Happiness is always temporary, but in my view adulthood is happier.</p>	

Model answer

Each stage of life has its ups and downs. Some feel that people are generally happiest as teenagers, while others believe adulthood is a happier time, even though it brings greater responsibilities. Personally, I agree with the latter point of view.

Life from the teenage perspective can seem very happy. Teenagers live with their parents, who meet all of their needs, and spend most of their day at school, surrounded by friends. They also enjoy long holidays and have plenty of opportunities to relax. In fact, groups of teens enjoying themselves are a common sight in many places. However, one of the reasons they are seen hanging around is that they often have little money and few places to go. Furthermore, at this age, our bodies and minds are still developing, so a lack of maturity can easily get them into trouble. There is also a great deal of pressure academically, with important exams to pass. Therefore, this time of life looks a lot happier on the outside than it is in reality.

For adults, everyday life is a lot less carefree. Living independently means we have to be able to afford accommodation and other expenses. There are also responsibilities associated with work, which often increase with our salary and workload. Working life also offers only a few short holidays each year. Thus, opportunities to relax are brief, so it is not surprising that adults might reminisce about their childhood years. Nevertheless, adulthood is a much longer stage of life, and with maturity comes the ability to deal with any challenges. This is also a period when most adults build their own family, home, and career. All of which brings a sense of personal satisfaction and happiness that is very different to anything experienced in our younger years.

In conclusion, happiness, like all emotions, is a temporary state. Although it is tempting to associate it with being young and carefree, in my view, it is a much more complex and deeper emotion that is closer to the contentment more often achieved in adulthood. (343)

In terms of vocabulary, there are several challenging, but common, themes in this essay. To improve your Lexical resource, look at my model answer and make a note of the words and phrases connected to the themes of *time*, *feelings*, and *age*. Without looking back at your list, can you fill in the blanks below? Repeat the exercise after a few days to help you review the words and phrases.

Each ¹ _____ has its ² _____. Some feel that people are generally happiest ³ _____, while others believe ⁴ _____ is ⁵ _____, even though it brings greater responsibilities.

Personally, I agree with the latter point of view.


Life from the teenage perspective can seem very happy. Teenagers live with their parents, who meet ⁶ _____ needs, and ⁷ _____ day at school, surrounded by friends. They also ⁸ _____ and ⁹ _____ relax. In fact, groups of teens enjoying themselves are a common sight in many places. However, one of the reasons they are seen hanging around is that they often ¹⁰ _____ and few places to go. Furthermore, ¹¹ _____, our ¹² _____ are still developing, so ¹³ _____ can easily get them into trouble. There is also a great deal of pressure academically, with important exams to pass. Therefore, this ¹⁴ _____ looks a lot happier on the outside than it is ¹⁵ _____.

For adults, ¹⁶ _____ is a lot less ¹⁷ _____. Living independently means we have to ¹⁸ _____ accommodation and ¹⁹ _____. There are also responsibilities associated with work, which often increase with our ²⁰ _____. ²¹ _____ also offers only a few short holidays each year. Thus, opportunities to relax are brief, so it is not surprising that adults might ²² _____ about their ²³ _____. Nevertheless, ²⁴ _____ is a much longer ²⁵ _____, and with ²⁶ _____ comes the ability to deal with any challenges. This is also ²⁷ _____ when most adults build their own family, home, and career. All of which ²⁸ _____ satisfaction and happiness that is very different to anything experienced ²⁹ _____.

In conclusion, happiness, like all emotions, is a temporary state. Although it is tempting to associate it with being ³⁰ _____, in my view, it is a much more ³¹ _____ emotion that is closer to the ³² _____ more often achieved in adulthood.

Step 4 – Check

Spend 10 minutes checking and editing your writing. Use the language you learned in this lesson to help correct any vocabulary problems and to make sure that you use the most natural words and phrases. When learning words, be sure to write down any words that go together with them, so that you can show 'an awareness of style and collocation' (Band 7 Lexical resource).

Extra practice 

- Write some practice sentences using the vocabulary lists you made in this lesson.
- My model essay contains 2 body paragraphs. However, you could decide to organise your essay into 3 body paragraphs, as follows:
 - 1) Happiness and the pros and cons of being a teenager
 - 2) The responsibilities of being an adult
 - 3) Happiness and the pros of being an adult

Or:

- 1) Happiness and the pros and cons of being a teenager
- 2) Happiness and the pros and cons of being an adult
- 3) My own opinion on which is the happiest time of life

To practise this, reorganise the ideas in your plan and write your essay with one of the suggestions above. You may find this creates a longer essay, and may not be practical for you in the test, but it is good practice in organising your ideas logically. Reorganise the ideas in my essay to do the same.

NB. There is no fixed rule about whether 4 or 5 paragraphs is best – the choice will always depend on the way that *you* decide to organise your ideas, which must be logical, with a clear central topic in each paragraph.

Lesson 14: Guided Test Practice 3 – Academic Test 1

A review of Introductions and Conclusions

This lesson will review writing an introduction and conclusion, and help you to create a model answer for Academic writing task 2, on page 31 of *Cambridge IELTS 9*.

The question says:

***Some experts believe that it is better for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school rather than secondary school.
Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?***

Comments on this task

- This task presents an argument that 'Some experts believe...'. The question will sometimes include facts, or a reference to experts or people like this to make the argument seem more valid, or to support the argument being made. As we have seen in previous lessons, changing the statement into a question can help identify the main issue to be discussed within the argument. Like this:

Is it better for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school rather than secondary school?

- Notice that this eliminates the reference to 'Some experts'. Thus, you are not being asked, 'Is it true that some experts believe...?' Or 'Why do some experts believe...?'
- Although you can refer to these people in your introduction, you do not need to discuss them in your essay, or say why they hold these views, which I sometimes see people trying to do. For example:
 - *Those who believe in increasing the number of sports centres cite the small numbers of them as a significant factor.*
 - *Proponents of the first contention point out that in their teenage years, a person can enjoy time with his friends. They also claim that happiness is ...*
 - *On the other hand, those who opine that mature people live more happily in spite of several obligations argue that a family gives more pleasure than anything else.*

These writers are claiming to know more about the people mentioned in the question than we have been told. During the body of your essay, it is better to ignore these anonymous sources and simply focus on the argument they represent.

Familiarity with the topic

I made two attempts at this essay before I was happy with the results. My first attempt, written before I had devised my planner, was over 400 words long, and played a significant part in convincing me of the need for a structured planning approach.

Part of my problem was that I have personal experience of learning and teaching a foreign language at primary school and high school. Being familiar with a topic isn't always the benefit that some people believe it to be. It can result in overly long paragraphs, with far more detail than is necessary. In fact, my first-hand knowledge was a hindrance without the planner; I had too many ideas and so I got carried away with my argument. When this happens, it is easy to become distracted from the task. Instead of simply writing a discursive essay in response to the question, you may find that you are trying to share as much of your knowledge as you can. With the planner, my knowledge was of some benefit: I did not need to hesitate when thinking up ideas for my argument, although I still had to think critically and cut any unnecessary ideas.

Key idea: If you are given a question related to your own area of expertise, be careful not to get carried away in your writing. Your aim is to meet the criteria for the test, not to share as much as you know on this subject. In practice, if you find yourself doing this, stop and start again.

14.1 Common problems in introductions

Introducing the general topic

Some experts believe that it is better for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school rather than secondary school.

Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?

Remember, the statements in the question represent an argument that you must discuss. You must identify the main topic or context for your essay, the specific issue you will discuss, and think about who or what you need to focus on. Look carefully at the essay question and make notes about this information on your worksheet. Compare your notes to mine:

[Click here to see my notes.](#)

After reading your introduction, the reader should not need to refer back to the question to fully understand these key details. Will your notes help you to do this?

The most helpful and logical way to begin is by introducing the general topic, and perhaps also the focus*, before going on to outline the specific issue that will be discussed. Below are seven opening statements from essays responding to this writing task. Which ones introduce the general topic and focus of this essay accurately and effectively? What problems can you identify in the problematic sentences? Did the writer add new details that are not in the question? Which one gives the wrong focus?

- A. *Recently, parents have become more keen to teach their offspring a second language during their childhood.*
- B. *Language has a significant importance in our life, people depend on it for every aspect of life.*
- C. *Currently, many schools already have provisions for teaching foreign language at secondary school level.*
- D. *Learning languages is an essential part of every child's education.*
- E. *Whether to teach children a foreign language in secondary school or in primary school is an often debated topic.*
- F. *Learning a foreign language, such as English, is very important in life.*
- G. *The trend of learning a foreign language is increasing rapidly in the modern world.*

*The focus

In some essays, introducing the focus is more important than in others; for example, if the focus is on a specific group of people, it is more important to make this clear. With this essay, the focus is on children and schools in general, so we are all affected in some way, and it is less important to specify this in your first sentence. Nevertheless, you should not misrepresent the focus (like option A above).

[Click here to see my comments.](#)

Introducing the issue – paraphrasing the question

Having set the context and general topic, we now need to introduce the issue, which we can do by paraphrasing the statement in the question. Remember, the two most common problems are: 1) unnatural language (from 'translating' the words in the question into synonyms), and 2) misrepresenting the issue in the question. To combat this, when paraphrasing the question, focus first on understanding the overall meaning. Use the following steps to help:

1. Write down what you can remember of the question. Compare your version to the original – did you forget any key details? Did you change the meaning? If your educational system encourages rote learning, you may be a little too good at memorising whole sentences, and so your version may be too close to the original. If so, the next steps will help.
2. Circle the key nouns and verbs in the question (*experts, children, begin, learn, foreign language, primary school, secondary school*). Remember, we do not need to replace any or all of these, only do this if you can think of a commonly used alternative that means the same. On your worksheet, make a list of any common synonyms you can think of.
3. Next, try to think of any related words. For example, this question refers to *children, schools, and learning*, so we could also logically add 'teachers' or 'teach' to provide a different way of giving the same information.
4. Look at the remaining parts of the statement (the words underlined in bold below):

Some experts believe that **it is better** for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school **rather than** secondary school.

Can you think of another way to express these ideas? You will find suggestions on the next page.

5. Practise these steps by paraphrasing the issue in this task using your synonyms or related words, and some of the words in the box below. Write your answers on your worksheet. Begin your sentence/s in any of the following ways:
- Some people believe that
 - Some people argue that
 - Some have suggested that

Instead, beneficial, start, study, helpful, teach, earlier

[Click here to see my suggestions.](#)

The following sentences are from essay introductions. Which do you think most closely paraphrases the issue in the question? What problems can you identify? Write your answers on your worksheet.

- A. *It is believed by many that if children started studying a language, other than their native language, they would probably become more proficient in it.*
- B. *For decades, students have been learning a foreign language at secondary school. However, some people argue that a foreign language should be introduced in the primary school curriculum.*
- C. *It is often considered that it is more effective for students to start acquiring knowledge of a foreign language during initial school years rather than during the secondary education years.*
- D. *Currently, many schools already have provisions for teaching foreign languages at the secondary school level. However, some experts emphasise the idea of introducing a foreign language at the primary level.*

[Click here to see my comments.](#)

Writing a thesis statement

As we saw in lesson 10, many people like to finish their introduction with a thesis* statement – a brief statement that sums up your argument and position. There are several common problems with these. Firstly, if you write a thesis statement before planning your argument, it is more than likely that it will not accurately represent your overall argument and position. A second common problem is presenting too much detail – it should act as a brief overview statement, and should not contain details of your argument. These points can be made in your conclusion, once you have presented and explained your argument.

**Vocabulary note: Your thesis is your main idea, your opinion, or your theory about the issue being discussed.*

In *The Key to IELTS Success*, I also discussed the 'scope' sentence, where people outline what their essay will include. As we have seen, this effectively paraphrases the task. Such sentences are used in much longer texts and help the reader to decide whether it will be useful for them to read. Your examiner does not need to be persuaded to read your essay and hopes it will include what you have been told to write about. Thus, sentences such as, 'I will discuss both views and then give my own opinion', are unnecessary and inadvisable in a 250-word formal essay.

Below is a list of 'thesis statements' from introductions to this question. I have corrected the main language errors. Can you identify any other problems? For example:

- Does it correspond to the argument made in the question?
 - Does it make a detailed argument instead of summarising?
 - Would this be better elsewhere (e.g. in the conclusion)?
 - Which ones are effective thesis statements? (i.e. briefly outlining the writer's thesis.)
- A. *It is agreed that the benefits of this are over-shadowed by the risks because, although it might help the school-leavers in getting an international education, it would impose a greater burden on the students.*
- B. *Some may think that this trend puts too much pressure on children and may affect their mother tongue learning. Nevertheless, I believe that the merits of this proposal surpass any possible side effects.*
- C. *This essay will analyse the advantages and disadvantages that arise when young learners are instructed to learn a foreign language in the initial stages of learning rather than at secondary school. Following this analysis, a reasoned conclusion will be shared.*
- D. *Despite the many advantages that may derive from this recommendation, I feel that learning a foreign language at primary school is predominantly disadvantageous.*
- E. *While I think there are certain drawbacks to learning a foreign language too early, I believe that the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages.*

[Click here to see my comments.](#)

14.2 Thinking and planning

Let's start working on our essay.

Some experts believe that it is better for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school rather than secondary school.

Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?

I will use the **T.P.W.C** (*Think, Plan, Write, Check*) steps to guide you through this question. If you feel confident enough, spend 10 minutes writing your plan for this essay before reading on. Use the planner and the following checklist:

Planning quick checklist

- *Think about the question*
- *Identify themes in the question and use these as headings*
- *Brainstorm and Plan:*
 - *use your own knowledge and experience of learning a foreign language to get ideas*
 - *visualise or imagine the different situations – think about yourself, your friends or family, your school etc.*
 - *ask further questions to develop these ideas*
 - *think about what your evidence shows to develop your main ideas or conclusions*
 - *check for recurring themes*
 - *organise and connect your ideas*

Step 1 – Think

Print off the planner at the end of your worksheets and think about the question. Make notes about the question in the introduction section.

Think about themes and list as many possible. Remember, these may be mentioned in the question, or they may be related themes you think of.

[Click here to see my suggestions.](#)

On your planner, use these as headings to help you generate ideas for your plan and to organise them.

Step 2 – Plan

The following questions will help you to gather ideas for your argument:

- *When did you first learn a foreign language? Did you find it easy or difficult?*
- *What made it easy / difficult? What effect did this have? Why?*
- *Think about your primary school years – did you learn a foreign language then? Was it helpful? What problems did you have?*
- *Think about your language teachers – do you think they had an easy job? What made it difficult?*
- *When you were in high school, did you study a foreign language? Was it helpful? How? Why? Why not?*
- *What effect did academic pressure and your school timetable have on your language learning? Why?*

Many of your ideas are likely to be personal to you – they will reflect your own experience or those of people you know. To write in an impersonal way, you need to think about what these ideas show and try to form general statements. What ideas from your own experience do you think are generally true for language learners everywhere? To practise this, look at the following examples from my own personal experience and, on your worksheet, complete the sentences on the right to create more general statements:

My personal experience:	More general statement:
When I was in primary school, my teacher tried to teach us a few words in French.	Students at primary school often only learn ...
When I was a high school French teacher, some of the students would laugh at others if they made a mistake, so they didn't want to speak French.	High school students may notbecause they may be afraid that.....

If there are ideas in your plan that are specific to your experience, or your town or school, and you cannot make a general statement about them, write the word '*context*' next to it. This will remind you that, when you are writing, you will need to make your perspective clear by explaining the context for your comments (you can review this idea of perspective in Lesson 5). In the table above, which parts of the sentences on the left help to make the context clear?

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Step 3 - Write

When you are happy with your plan, write the introduction and body paragraphs of your essay. Complete the next exercises before writing your conclusion.

Writing a conclusion

At the conclusion stage, all that remains is to sum up your main ideas, make your position clear, and ensure you have answered the question. Look at the following extracts, which do you think is most successful in doing this? Do any of these conclusions introduce new themes or ideas that are not relevant to the question? Why do you think this might be a problem? Can you see any language problems?

- A. *In a word, it is obvious that the benefits of learning a foreign language early in life overcome the drawbacks. With globalization and increased communication among different countries, the world has become smaller and smaller, and so it is our duty to teach our children a foreign language to be able to cope with this progress. Knowing a second language has become inevitable and so it is better and easier to start it from childhood.*
- B. *The advantages and disadvantages of this topic are numerous. However, after analysing both sides, it is felt that learning a foreign language at primary level has more drawbacks than benefits. It is thus recommended that, teachers weigh the pros and cons before engaging their students in such type of learning.*
- C. *In conclusion, while I agree that learning a foreign language too early can harm kids to some extent, I would say that beginning this study at primary school is better than at secondary school.*

On your worksheet, make a note of any problems or language corrections and compare your answers with my comments.

[Click here to see my comments.](#)

Now look back at the introduction and body paragraphs you have written for your essay and write your conclusion. Make sure to summarise the main points in your argument, answer the question in the task, and make your overall position very clear. When you have finished, move on to the listening exercises based on my model essay.

14.3 Developing range and accuracy

The following listening exercises will help you to focus on the separate criteria used to assess your answer.

🔊 Listening exercise

Listen to the complete recording of my essay first, then complete the exercises below on your worksheet.

[🔊 Click here to listen to the model answer.](#)

1) Introduction – Lexical resource and Grammatical range and accuracy

Without listening again, on your worksheet, fill in as many of the gaps in my introduction as you can. Then listen to the recording of the introduction to complete any gaps:

The _____ to speak a second language is _____ skill. However, _____ debate over _____ learn a new language, with some experts believing _____ at primary school. In my view, _____ little _____ starting _____ stage.

[🔊 Click here to listen to the introduction.](#)

2) Body paragraph 1 – Coherence and cohesion

Listen to the recording of the first body paragraph and fill in the gaps on your worksheet as you listen:

[🔊 Click here to listen to the first body paragraph.](#)

_____ to learning a foreign language early in life. The brains of young children are often compared to sponges _____ ability to soak up knowledge. _____, _____ can learn languages far more easily _____. _____ lack the self-consciousness _____ interfere with language learning at high school, _____ can be reluctant to make pronunciation mistakes in front of _____. _____, primary school students are happier to take risks _____, _____ can have fun with _____ learning. _____ mastering a language takes a long time, _____ to see _____ recommend starting _____.

3) Body paragraph 2 – Task response

Listen to the recording of the second body paragraph and fill in the gaps on your worksheet as you listen:

[🔊 Click here to listen to the second body paragraph.](#)

Nevertheless, there are several challenges to introducing a second language _____. Firstly, primary students _____ one core teacher _____. This means the staff _____ to teach a foreign language. Secondly, _____ in a child's education; they _____ the basics of literacy and numeracy _____. Thus, teachers do not have the time to _____ words and phrases in another language. Furthermore, to learn a second language, _____ mother tongue _____, which primary school students _____. _____, adding a foreign language _____, and _____ some. Therefore, the disadvantages _____.

4) Conclusion – Lexical resource and Grammatical range and accuracy

Before you listen, fill in as many of the gaps in my conclusion as you can, then listen to the recording to complete any gaps:

In conclusion, in my view, _____ benefits _____ study _____ foreign language _____ very young age, and the challenges _____ these. The primary school years _____ - _____ time for children; adding _____ their _____ likely _____ alter _____ .

[Click here to listen to the conclusion.](#)

Compare your answers to the model answer on the next page.


Model answer

The ability to speak a second language is a useful life skill. However, there is some debate over the best age to learn a new language, with some experts believing this should happen at primary school. In my view, there is little benefit in starting so young.

There are some advantages to learning a foreign language early in life. The brains of young children are often compared to sponges because of their ability to soak up knowledge. Consequently, they can learn languages far more easily than adults. They also lack the self-consciousness that can interfere with language learning at high school, when students can be reluctant to make pronunciation mistakes in front of their peers. In contrast, primary school students are happier to take risks and, as a result, can have fun with their learning. As mastering a language takes a long time, it is easy to see why some people recommend starting as young as possible.

Nevertheless, there are several challenges to introducing a second language at such a young age. Firstly, primary students generally have one teacher rather than several specialist ones. This means the staff may not have the necessary skills to teach a foreign language. Secondly, this is a crucial stage in a child's education; they must learn the basics of literacy and numeracy to succeed later on. Thus, teachers do not have the time to teach more than a few basic words and phrases in another language. Furthermore, to learn a second language, a good knowledge of your mother tongue is needed, which primary school students do not yet have. In fact, adding a foreign language may even interfere with this, and is likely to put added pressure on some. Therefore, the disadvantages of such a scheme are significant.

In conclusion, there appear to be limited benefits to studying a foreign language at a very young age, and the challenges far outweigh these. The primary school years should be a stress-free time for children; adding more to their curriculum is likely to alter that for the worse. (342)

Extra practice 

- 1) Look back over the introductions in some of your previous essays. Try to recreate the test question from the information in your introduction. This will show you how closely your introduction reflects the task. How did you finish your introduction? Is your introduction too long? Too short?

If you notice any problems, rewrite the introductions and make sure to include:

- a general statement to introduce the topic or context of the essay
- a statement that summarises the main issue to be discussed
- a brief thesis statement that summarises your overall position (if preferred)

- 2) Look back at the conclusions of some previous essays and check whether they are effective in:
 - summarising the main ideas in your argument
 - answering the question
 - making your overall position clear

Are your conclusions too long or too short? Did you include extra themes or ideas that are not discussed or explained in your essay? Rewrite any conclusions that are problematic.

- 3) Look back over any previous essays based on a topic that is very familiar to you and use the following questions to think critically about your response:
 - Is your answer longer than the other essays that you usually produce?
 - Did you use your essay to show how much you know, or did you limit yourself to answering the question?
 - Does your answer contain technical details related to your field or profession?

If necessary, plan and write a new answer using the planner – aim to write a shorter, less detailed answer.

Lesson 15 – Addressing Band 6 problems

15.1 Identifying language problems

Look at the following example of a band 6.5 essay based on the question from lesson 14. Read the essay and try to identify any problems in Task response, Coherence and cohesion, Lexical resource, and Grammatical range and accuracy. Remember, it is easier to spot problems in other people's writing, which is why it can be helpful to work with another student of a similar level. The more you practise with this, the easier it will be to find these problems in your own essays.

Language has a significant importance in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. It is argued by researchers that, the early introduction of a second language in primary schools might seem advantageous rather than in secondary ones. In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages that lies beneath it.

There are tangible benefits of learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, children have the potential to acquire the language quicker and faster. Students who are at a young age would find it easier to learn than those who are older. Namely, recent research revealed that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. It is undeniable that age is an important factor in education. Secondly, the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a younger age. Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, for many they will find it advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they learnt it the better.

However, this might not be the case for every student. Some would find difficult to cope with studying an extra language beside the other subjects in primary schools. This could be deemed as tough. Thus, they might end up losing their concentration on more important subjects such as mathematics and science. Another problem to be addressed it that a second language might not seem to be appealing to everyone. Some would feel it is oppressive not to choose what they want to learn. In some cases, learners would like to study different subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, this obligatory step to teach a language might have negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this opinion in my view I completely disagree about teaching a second language in primary educational settings, as it should not be compulsory for everyone. It is important to be keep the students interested in learning. (335 words)

General comments

This essay is a good example of an answer where the language meets the criteria for band 7, but the Task response and Coherence and cohesion problems reduce the score to below band 7. This is not a vocabulary or grammar test, it is a writing test, so your Task response and Coherence and cohesion are very important.

Grammatical range and accuracy

First, we'll address the language problems, beginning with the grammar problems, which are highlighted below. On your worksheet, try to fill in as much of the table as you can by making notes about the problems and suggesting changes. Use the hints below to help. Which errors do you think might be slips?

Correct as many of the **grammar** mistakes as you can.

Language has a significant importance in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. **1It is argued by researchers 2that, the** early introduction of a second language in primary schools might seem **3advantageous rather than in secondary ones**. In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages that **4lies** beneath it.

There are tangible benefits of learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, children have the potential to acquire the language quicker and faster. Students who are at a young age **5would** find it easier to learn than those who are older. Namely, **6recent research revealed** that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. It is undeniable that age is an important factor in education. Secondly, the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a **7younger** age. Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, **8for many they will find it** advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they **9learnt** it the better.

However, this might not be the case for every student. Some **10would 11find difficult** to cope with studying an extra language beside the other subjects in primary **12schools**. This could be deemed as tough. Thus, they might end up losing their concentration on more important subjects such as mathematics and science. Another problem to be addressed **13it** that a second language might not seem to be appealing to everyone. Some **14would 15feel it is oppressive not to choose what they want to learn**. In some cases, learners **16would** like to study different subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, this obligatory step to teach a language might have negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this **17opinion in my view** I completely disagree **18about** teaching a second language in primary educational settings, as it should not be compulsory for everyone. It is important **19to be keep 20the** students interested in learning.

Hints:

- 1) passive; 2) comma use; 3) word order; 4) verb subject agreement; 5) modal; 6) tense; 7) comparative;
- 8) extra (unnecessary) words; 9) tense; 10) modal; 11) needs an object; 12) plural / singular; 13) verb needed (likely a slip/typo) ;14) Modal; 15) verb missing & word order; 16) modal; 17) commas; 18) preposition; 19) extra verb (a slip?); 20) article

You will find the completed table on the next page.

Answers


Grammar problems		
	Problem	change to
1	use of passive – active is better here – there is no need to highlight or put emphasis on the agent (who did this)	Researchers argue
2	comma use – no comma needed - this is effectively saying 'the experts argue that the early introduction...' a comma is only needed if there is extra information being added (parenthetically)	Remove comma
3	Word order	introducing it in primary school rather than in secondary school OR it would be more advantageous to introduce ...
4	verb subject agreement (singular used instead of plural)	lie
5	modal – likelihood (too firm a prediction being made)	Would probably / are likely to
6	tense - present perfect with recent or recently	Recent research has revealed
7	comparative - not needed (no comparison is being made)	young
8	extra unnecessary words (mixes two structures)	either: many people will find it or For many it will be
9	tense – should be simple present (Effectively, this is saying 'If they learn English, they will find it advantageous' and 'the earlier they learn it the better'.)	the earlier they learn it the better
10	modal - likelihood (too firm a prediction being made)	may / could / might
11	needs an object (find <i>something</i> difficult) (could be a slip? Used correctly earlier)	Find it difficult to cope
12	plural / singular (singular needed) as this refers to the stage of being in primary school not the buildings	in primary school, (not 'in primary schools')
13	verb needed (likely a slip/typo)	is
14	Modal – likelihood (too firm a prediction being made)	might / could
15	verb missing	not ' <i>to be able</i> ' to choose
16	Modal – likelihood (too firm a prediction being made)	May or might
17	Commas are needed	, in my view,
18	Something is missing (either preposition or clause)	disagree <i>with</i> the idea of x or disagree that x is a good idea
19	Unnecessary verb - the writer might have changed his mind from 'to be kept interested'? (a slip?)	Remove 'be' (to keep students interested)
20	article not needed with the plural – all students not specific students	keep students interested

Compare the changes you made to the corrected version in the next exercise (the answers are in bold).

Lexical resource

A very common problem at band 6.5 is candidates trying to boost their score by using 'high-level' vocabulary, and often using two or three words when one is enough. The vast majority of any text is made up of words in the A1 to B2 level, so using a lot of high-level words produces very unnatural language. A further problem is that using words for effect, rather than because they help you to explain your meaning, often results in language that is not precise. This can also have an impact on your argument (you can review this idea in lessons 2.3 and 6.2).

You will not score band 7 for Lexical resource unless you show 'an awareness of style and collocation', as well as showing 'flexibility and precision'. I am often asked what the word 'flexibility' means here. To me, it is about having a wide enough vocabulary to explain ideas clearly, even when you do not always know exactly the right words to use. In other words, using the words that you *do* know in a way that will fill in the gaps in your vocabulary (the words that you don't yet know). I see the approach to vocabulary by candidates at different levels like this:

<p>What is this?</p> 	<p>Band 9: Natural sophisticated control</p> <p><i>This is a common or garden spade.</i></p>
	<p>Band 8: Can convey precise meaning</p> <p><i>This is a spade.</i></p>
	<p>Band 7: A sufficient range to allow flexibility and precision</p> <p><i>This is a tool used to dig a hole.</i></p>
	<p>Band 6: Attempts to use less common vocabulary with some inaccuracy</p> <p><i>The excavation digging implement is lying in the adjacent space.</i></p>

To many band 6 candidates, 'longer and more complex' means 'higher level', and one of the most difficult jobs for a teacher is trying to persuade people at this level to write in a simpler way, especially when they have invested so much time and effort in learning 'high-level' words. This shows why your approach to language is important – the simpler, band 7 version above is better than the band 6 attempt to showcase higher level words without an understanding of their style and meaning. It is better because the meaning is clearer, and clear communication must be your aim when writing.

Key idea: Write what you mean. Don't try to boost your score by using high-level words – these will often hide your real meaning and make your argument and ideas unclear.

To improve the lexical resource score of this essay, try to identify and correct the vocabulary problems highlighted below. Some of the problems are connected to collocation (words that naturally go together), others may be due to the writer's attempt to use 'less common' vocabulary, or several variations of the same idea, again to show their vocabulary knowledge. If you cannot identify the problem, think of a simpler word to replace the highlighted words. Use the hints in the box to help, and write your answers on the table on your worksheet. Which vocabulary problem has an impact on the writer's argument?

Can you correct the **vocabulary** mistakes?

Language ¹has a significant importance in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. **Researchers argue that the** ²early introduction of a second language in primary schools **rather than in secondary school** might ³seem more advantageous. In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages that ⁴lie beneath it.

There are ⁵tangible ⁶benefits of learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, children have the potential to acquire the language ⁷quicker and faster. Students who are at a young age **would probably** find it easier to learn than those who are older. Namely, recent research **has revealed** that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. It is undeniable that age is an important factor in education. Secondly, the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a **young** age. Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, **many will find it** advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they **learn** it the better.

However, this might not be the case for every student. Some **might find it difficult** to cope with studying an extra language ⁸beside the ⁹other subjects in **primary school**. This could be ¹⁰deemed as tough. Thus, they might ¹¹end up ¹²losing their concentration on more important subjects such as mathematics and science. Another problem to be addressed **is** that a second language might not ¹³seem to be appealing to everyone. Some **might feel that not being able to choose what they want to learn** is ¹⁴oppressive. In some cases, learners might like to study ¹⁵different subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, ¹⁶this obligatory step to teach a language might have negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this ¹⁷opinion, ¹⁸in my view, I completely disagree with teaching a second language in ¹⁹primary educational settings, as it should not be compulsory for everyone. It is important to **keep students** interested in learning.

Hints:

- 1) Choose one; 2) unnecessary; 3) simpler is better; 4) the meaning is not precise; 5) not true; 6) collocation (see the language note below); 7) choose one; 8) word form; 9) the meaning is not precise; 10) simpler is better & collocation; 11) informal; 12) collocation & the meaning is not precise; 13) choose one; 14) the meaning is not precise (extreme adjective); 15) the meaning is not precise; 16) the meaning is not precise & collocation; 17) the meaning is not precise; 18) choose one; 19) simpler is better

You can find the answers on the next page.

Language note
 When studying vocabulary, make sure to learn any necessary prepositions. For example, these are the many different ways we can use the word benefit:

Noun:
For (someone's) **benefit**
For the benefit of someone
With the benefit of
Without the benefit of
The benefits for (someone) are
The benefits to (someone)
Be of benefit to (someone)
To (someone's) **benefit**
 There are **benefits to doing** something (a general, possible or future sense – if you do this, this is how you may benefit)
The benefits from (doing) something are...(these are proven or known benefits) – I did it and I have benefitted)

Verb: (Someone) **benefits from**; (someone) **can / will / would benefit from**

Answers

Lexical resource

	Problem	change to
1	Choose one – significant means important, this is essentially saying 'language has an important importance'.	either it is a significant x or: it is important -
2	unnecessary	Cut or remove 'in primary school rather than in secondary school'
3	simpler is better	be
4	Not precise	Change to 'this can bring / could bring'
5	not true – the benefits described here do not seem significant enough to be described as tangible - used for effect rather than to help the writer be more precise?	Clear
6	collocation (see language note)	benefits to learning
7	choose one	Either faster or quicker not both
8	meaning is not precise + word form – besides = also; beside = next to; 'in addition to' would be more precise	In addition
9	the meaning is not precise	either the 'core' subjects or 'the other subjects that have to be learned'
10	simpler is better + collocation (deemed is not used with 'as')	Remove 'deemed as'
11	informal	Find that they
12	collocation + the meaning is not precise (lose your concentration <i>when</i> doing something)	losing their concentration when studying.. Or struggle to concentrate on other subjects
13	Choose one	Either It might not seem appealing / it might not be appealing, or it might not appeal
14	the meaning is not precise (too extreme) (affects the argument being made as these effects are not 'oppressive')	A little restrictive? unfair?
15	the meaning is not precise (different means 'not the same') what is needed here is 'different to the subject already mentioned)	Other
16	the meaning is not precise + collocation (we cannot say 'a step to do something') 'teach' is incorrect here	obligation to learn a language
17	the meaning is not precise – this is not an opinion	Suggestion / proposal
18	Choose one	Either 'in my view, x is not a good idea'... or 'I completely disagree with...'
19	simpler is better	Primary schools / lower schools

15.2 Addressing Coherence and cohesion problems

The next image shows the essay with the language problems corrected. What Coherence and cohesion problems can you identify? Think about how the ideas are connected and the use of cohesive devices, as well as the PEEL structure.

Language is important in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. It is argued by researchers that the early introduction of a second language in primary schools rather than at secondary school might be advantageous. In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages this could bring.

There are clear benefits to learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, children have the potential to acquire the language quicker. Students who are at a young age find it easier to learn than those who are older. Namely, recent research has revealed that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. It is undeniable that age is an important factor in education. Secondly, the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a young age. Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, many would find it advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they learn it the better.

However, this might not be the case for every student. Some may find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language as well as the other subjects that must be learned in primary school. This could be tough for them. Thus, they might struggle to concentrate on more important subjects such as mathematics and science. Another problem to be addressed is that a second language might not appeal to everyone. Some might feel that not being able to choose what they want to learn is a little unfair. In some cases, learners might like to study other subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, this obligation to learn a language might have negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons of this suggestion, I completely disagree with teaching a second language in primary education as it should not to be compulsory for everyone. It is important to keep students interested in learning.

You can find the main problems highlighted on the next page.

Did you find the problems highlighted below? On your worksheet, make a note of how you would address these problems.

What changes would you make to solve these **Coherence and cohesion** problems?

Language is important in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. Researchers argue that the introduction of a second language in primary schools rather than at secondary school might be advantageous. In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages it could bring.

There are clear benefits of learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, ¹children have the potential to acquire the language quicker. Students who are at a young age would probably find it easier to learn than those who are older. ²Namely, recent research has revealed that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. ³It is undeniable that age is an important factor in education. Secondly, the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a young age. ⁴Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, many would find it advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they learn it the better.

⁵However, this might not be the case for every student. Some may find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language as well as the other subjects that must be learned in primary school. This could be tough for them. ⁶Thus, they might struggle to concentrate on more important subjects such as mathematics and science. Another problem to be addressed is that a second language might not appeal to everyone. Some might feel that not being able to choose what they want to learn is a little unfair. In some cases, learners might like to study other subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, this obligation to learn a language might have negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this suggestion, I completely disagree with teaching a second language in primary education, as it should not be compulsory for everyone. It is important to keep students interested in learning.

Compare your answers to those on the next page.

Answers

Coherence and cohesion comments		
	Problem	Solution
1	Reference not clear - All children?	Change to ' <i>young children</i> ' or ' <i>these children</i> '
2	Cohesive device not being used appropriately Namely is used before naming a list of things previously mentioned	Change to ' <i>In Fact</i> '
3	Cohesive device not being used appropriately – we need to show that this is a conclusion based on the previous evidence	Change to ' <i>This shows that</i> '
4	There is an organisation problem here. This example supports the idea of learning a language early in life, so it should be earlier in this paragraph.	Move earlier in the paragraph
5	Does this make the central topic of this paragraph clear? The reference is also unclear – what does 'this might not be the case' refer back to? The previous sentence was an example.	Change to: <i>Nevertheless, learning a foreign language may not be of benefit to every student at this age.</i>
6	Cohesive device not being used effectively This is describing the effect or result of something	Change to ' <i>As a result</i> '

You can find the corrections in the next version – the Coherence and cohesion changes I made are in bold.

15.3 Addressing Task response problems – a fully developed argument

Addressing Task response issues is more difficult. To do this, we need to think about the argument being made and the writer's position. To assess this, we need to look back at the question:

Some experts believe that it is better for children to begin learning a foreign language at primary school rather than secondary school.
Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?

Below, I have highlighted Task response problems in the essay. For the moment, just try to identify the problem and fill in the first column on the table on your worksheet. To help, ask the following:

- Can you identify the point or argument being made? (is it clear?)
- Is this idea relevant to this essay question?
- Are the conclusions clear?
- Are the conclusions repetitive?
- Is there supporting evidence for this idea?
- Does the writer prove or show this?
- Is this position clear throughout?

¹Language is important in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. Researchers argue that the introduction of a second language in primary schools rather than in secondary school might be more advantageous. ²In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages it could bring.

There are clear benefits to learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, **young** children have the potential to acquire the language faster. ³Students who are at a young age would probably find it easier to learn than those who are older. **In fact**, recent research has revealed that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. **This shows that** age is an important factor in education. ⁴**Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, many will find it advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they learn it the better.** Secondly, ⁵the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a young age.

Nevertheless, learning a foreign language may not be of benefit to every student at this age. Some might find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language in addition to the other subjects they have to learn in primary school. ⁶This could be tough. **As a result**, they ⁷might find themselves losing their concentration when studying more important subjects, such as mathematics and science. ⁸Another problem to be addressed is that ⁹a second language might not appeal to everyone. ¹⁰Some might feel that not being able to choose what they want to learn is a little unfair. ¹¹In some cases, learners might like to study other subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, ¹²this obligation to learn a language might have ¹³negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this proposal, ¹⁴I completely disagree with teaching a second language in primary schools, ¹⁵as it should not be compulsory for everyone. ¹⁶It is important to keep students interested in learning.

Compare your answers with the comments in the table on the next page.

Task response comments

	Problem	Solution
1	Language is not the general topic here so this point is not relevant (people do not depend enormously on second language, nor does it affect every aspect of life.)	
2	Too personal	
3	This repeats the previous idea	
4	This example does not support the previous idea. It is not an example, it is a reason why people might choose to learn a foreign language	
5	The point being made is not clear, and the paragraph feels unfinished	
6	This is a repetition of the previous point	
7	Is this a logical conclusion?	
8	The tone is not quite right here – the essay did not ask for problems and solutions	
9	The point and its relevance is not clear	
10+	These sentences make the same point: that the primary school children might want to choose their own subjects – can primary students do this? This does not seem to be a valid argument	
11		
12	This does not reflect the question – there is no obligation to study mentioned	
13	This does not reflect the ideas within the paragraph – these are not negative outcomes	
14	The argument made does not support this position – the argument in support of learning the language early is much stronger.	
15	This does not accurately reflect the question	
16	It is not clear what point is being made here	

¹Language is important in our life, people depend enormously on it in every aspect of life. Researchers argue that the introduction of a second language in primary schools rather than in secondary school might be more advantageous. ²In this essay I will discuss this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages it could bring.

There are clear benefits to learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, **young** children have the potential to acquire the language faster. ³Students who are at a young age would probably find it easier to learn than those who are older. **In fact**, recent research has revealed that the size of the brain shrinks as we age. **This shows that** age is an important factor in education. ⁴Take the example of overseas students who tend to come and study in the United Kingdom, many will find it advantageous to learn English as a second language, and the earlier they learn it the better. Secondly, ⁵the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to become more rounded as individuals and learn about different cultures from a young age.

Nevertheless, learning a foreign language may not be of benefit to every student at this age. Some might find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language in addition to the other subjects they have to learn in primary school. ⁶This could be tough. **As a result**, they ⁷might find themselves losing their concentration when studying more important subjects, such as mathematics and science. ⁸Another problem to be addressed is that ⁹a second language might not appeal to everyone. ¹⁰Some might feel that not being able to choose what they want to learn is a little unfair. ¹¹In some cases, learners might like to study other subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, ¹²this obligation to learn a language might have ¹³negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this proposal, ¹⁴I completely disagree with teaching a second language in primary schools, ¹⁵as it should not be compulsory for everyone. ¹⁶It is important to keep students interested in learning.

Think about what you would need to do to solve these problems and complete the 'solution' section of the table on your worksheet.

Answers

Task response comments		
	Problem	Solution
1	Language is not the general topic here so this point is not relevant (people do not depend enormously on a second language, nor does it affect every aspect of life.)	Replace the sentence with one that introduces the general topic.
2	Too personal	Change to 'This essay will...
3	This repeats the previous idea	Remove one, or combine the two sentences
4	This example does not support the previous idea. It is not an example, it is a reason why people might choose to learn a foreign language	Reword this so that it provides a possible reason why people might want to learn a foreign language early.
5	The point being made is not clear, and the paragraph feels unfinished	Reword this sentence to show the point being made and the reason for believing this. Add a final sentence that shows why this is relevant to the question (i.e. link back to the question).
6	This is a repetition of the previous point	cut
7	Is this a logical conclusion?	What other effect might this have on students and learning?
8	The tone is not quite right here – the essay did not ask for problems and solutions	Rephrase
9	The point and its relevance is not clear	Change to 'learning a second language'
10+ 11	These sentences make the same point: that the primary school children might want to choose their own subjects – can primary students do this? This does not seem to be a valid argument	A new point needs to be made – especially as this body paragraph should make the stronger argument. Replace with a new idea and a stronger argument.
11	This does not reflect the question – there is no obligation to study mentioned	Reword
13	This does not reflect the ideas within the paragraph – these are not negative outcomes so this conclusion and position is unclear	Keep this sentence but change the ideas within the paragraph to show 'negative outcomes' and make a stronger argument (and make the position clear throughout)
14	The argument made does not support this position – the argument in support of learning the language in body paragraph 1 is much stronger.	Either change this position or rewrite the argument to support this position
15	This does not accurately reflect the question	Rephrase
16	It is not clear what point is being made here	Cut or find a way to make the point clearer

The image on the next page shows the changes I made to address these problems.

The Task response changes are shown in blue:

Learning a foreign language is very useful in life. Researchers argue that the introduction of a second language in primary school rather than at secondary school might be advantageous. **This essay will discuss** this proposal and the advantages and disadvantages it could bring.

There are clear benefits to learning a foreign language in primary school. Firstly, young children have the potential to **acquire language faster than those who are older**. In fact, recent research has revealed that the size of the brain shrinks as we age, **which affects our ability to learn**. **Thus, as so many students now travel overseas to study in the United Kingdom or other English-speaking countries, it could be argued that the earlier such students learn a second language like this the better**. Secondly, the introduction of a foreign language could be seen as an opportunity for every pupil to learn about different cultures at a young age and, therefore, become more rounded as individuals. **This type of understanding not only helps individual students, but it also promotes tolerance, which benefits society as a whole.**


Nevertheless, learning a foreign language may not be of benefit to every student at this age. Some may find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language as well as the other subjects that must be learned in primary school. As a result, they might struggle to concentrate on more important subjects, such as mathematics and science. Another problem is that, **even though a second language is beneficial**, it might not appeal to everyone, **particularly if they have no future plans to travel or study overseas**. **Therefore, as well as adding unnecessary pressure, this may not be advantageous to everyone.**

All things considered, **although there are disadvantages to this suggestion, in my view, the advantages are greater**. **Having said this, it should not be compulsory for every student, as some may struggle and may have no desire to travel, and it is important to keep students interested in their learning.**

I have tried to stick as closely to the original as possible, but I had to change the overall position, because the ideas in the second body paragraph do not provide a convincing argument that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. As a result, this is now an example of band 8 skills (the argument being made is not as fully developed as band 9 Task response requires). There are several problems:

- 1) In the first body paragraph, a better example is needed to support the claim that 'the earlier students learn the language the better'. The current example is not relevant to the majority of primary school students, so this does not support the idea well.
- 2) In the second body paragraph, the inability to concentrate on other subjects does not seem convincing – why does having a language class affect your ability to concentrate when you are in a maths class?

Key idea: If the writer spent more time planning their argument before starting to write, these problems would have been avoided.

Extra practice 

Read my comments on the problems in the second body paragraph and the conclusion.

Nevertheless, learning a foreign language may not be of benefit to every student at this age. Some might find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language in addition to the other subjects they have to learn in primary school. ⁶This could be tough. As a result, they ⁷might find themselves losing their concentration when studying more important subjects, such as mathematics and science. ⁸Another problem to be addressed is that ⁹a second language might not appeal to everyone. ¹⁰Some might feel that not being able to choose what they want to learn is a little unfair. ¹¹In some cases, learners might like to study other subjects that interest them rather than a new language. Thus, ¹²this obligation to learn a language might have ¹³negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are pros and cons to this proposal, ¹⁴I completely disagree with teaching a second language in primary schools, ¹⁵as it should not be compulsory for everyone. ¹⁶It is important to keep students interested in learning.

6	This is a repetition of the previous point	cut
7	Is this a logical conclusion?	What other effect might this have on students and learning?
8	The tone is not quite right here – the essay did not ask for problems and solutions	Rephrase
9	The point and its relevance is not clear	Change to 'learning a second language'
10+	These sentences make the same point: that the primary school children might want to choose their own subjects – can primary students do this? This does not seem to be a valid argument	A new point needs to be made – especially as this body paragraph should make the stronger argument. Replace with a new idea and a stronger argument.
11		
11	This does not reflect the question – there is no obligation to study mentioned	Reword
13	This does not reflect the ideas within the paragraph – these are not negative outcomes so this conclusion and position is unclear	Keep this sentence but change the ideas within the paragraph to show 'negative outcomes' and make a stronger argument (and make the position clear throughout)
14	The argument made does not support this position – the argument in support of learning the language in body paragraph 1 is much stronger.	Either change this position or rewrite the argument to support this position
15	This does not accurately reflect the question	Rephrase
16	It is not clear what point is being made here	Cut or find a way to make the point clearer

Think about how you can improve the argument made in the second paragraph. For example:

- *reaching a different conclusion about what the supporting evidence shows*
- *thinking of new supporting evidence*
- *adding any ideas that would help create a valid argument to support the overall position*

Make a new plan for the paragraph and write a new second body paragraph and conclusion using any of the language you have learned from lessons 14 and 15.

Or fill in the gaps in this version:

Nevertheless, learning a foreign language may not be of benefit to every student at this age. Some may find it difficult to cope with studying an extra language as well as the other subjects that must be learned in primary school. As a result, they might _____ such as mathematics and science. Another problem is that, _____.

Therefore, _____ might have negative outcomes.

All things considered, although there are _____ to this suggestion, in my view, the _____ are greater. _____.

NB Make sure that you present ideas that are 'negative outcomes'.

LESSON 16 – Test practice 4

Academic writing task 2 – To what extent do you agree or disagree?

This task can be found on Cambridge IELTS 9, page 54. The question says:

Some people believe that unpaid community service should be a compulsory part of high school programmes (for example, working for a charity, improving the neighbourhood, or teaching sports to younger children).

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

16.1 Timing

We have now completed 4 essays using the planner and T.P.W.C approach, so you should be ready to think about timing more seriously. Don't impose a time limit yet, instead, when you are working on a task, make a note of how long each stage takes you. This will show you where you still need to practise more, and whether your total time is more than 40 minutes. Again, I use an app on my phone to help with this, and there are plenty of apps designed to help you track your activities.

My timing for this task was:

- 8 minutes **T**hinking and **P**lanning
- 17 minutes **W**riting
- 8 minutes **C**hecking and editing

In all of my test practice, my fastest planning time was 7 minutes and my slowest was 10, but this was unusual – 8 minutes was my most common time. When it came to writing, I fluctuated between 15 and 17 minutes, with almost every essay taking 17 minutes to write. Interestingly, the only essay that I finished writing in 15 minutes was one that I had spent 10 minutes planning. The same essay also required less editing. The lesson to learn from this is that you do not need to aim to speed up your planning, or set yourself a goal to 'plan in less than 10 minutes' – thorough planning is more important than fast planning.

Key idea: Remember, planning *is* writing, so don't speed through this stage. If you plan well, and for long enough, you will find the writing stage easier and faster.

Comments on the task

- This task presents one viewpoint or argument and asks to what extent you agree or disagree with it. If this was a General Training task, the question would ask, *Do you agree or disagree?*
- Many people worry about these tasks, but the simplest way to approach them is to see side A as 'agree' and side B as 'disagree', so that you present a balanced discussion that considers both sides before reaching your own conclusion. This means planning as follows:

Side A – Agree (reasons why compulsory community service in high schools might be good)

Side B – Disagree (reasons why compulsory community service in high school might not be good)

- Essentially, we are again looking at the pros and cons of this proposal. Notice that I wrote '*might be good*'. This would show a neutral stance. However, you may be given a topic that you feel very strongly in favour of, or against. For example, you may have strong personal views on prisons, the justice system, or the environment, and find it difficult to understand the opposing viewpoint. If you are given a question that you feel very strongly about, you might prefer to present an argument like those we saw in lesson 7, when we looked at making a counterargument.
- Someone who lives in a country where community service is compulsory is likely to have stronger views about this issue than someone who does not. Everyone's experience and perspective is different. This is why there is no single correct answer, and why you must approach each essay question in a flexible way rather than taking one fixed approach to certain question 'types'.

- The question contains some examples to make sure that you understand what the term 'community service' means.

Key idea: Be sure to make your perspective clear if you are drawing on personal experience or describing something that happens in your country.

Plan and write your essay using the **T.P.W.C** approach. Record your times for each step and compare them to the recommendations below:

Steps	Recommended time
Think Think about the question, identify the topic, the issue, possible themes, and your initial position	1-2 mins
Plan I. Brainstorm to get initial ideas – gather evidence II. Think critically to connect and organise ideas into a clear balanced argument that supports your position	7-8 mins
} Total 10 mins	
Write Write out the essay from your plan	18 – 20 mins
Check I. Check your position and argument are clear throughout; check there is one clear topic in each paragraph and PEEL structure II. Check language - make language changes for clarity or to avoid repetition; correct errors	8 mins
III. Proofread – slips, typos and error spotting	2 mins
} Total 10 mins	

16.2 Making your position clear throughout

As we have seen in previous lessons, modal verbs are important when it comes to making your position clear throughout. The following exercises will help you to practise this idea.

🔊 Listening exercise

Print off a copy of the planner then listen to a recording of my essay. Decide what my position is and think about how I make this clear throughout.

[🔊 Click here to listen.](#)

Thesis statements

Many teachers recommend adding a thesis statement to your introduction so that you make your position clear from the very beginning of your essay. However, you will only achieve this if your thesis statement accurately represents your overall argument and position.

To practise this, the sentences below show different possible endings to the final sentence in my conclusion. Which of the underlined phrases could be added to make my position more obvious in the introduction? Which options would make my position *unclear throughout*?

- A) Doing so could have repercussions for all concerned, but it should not be compulsory.
- B) Doing so could have repercussions for all concerned, and is likely to cause a lot of problems.
- C) Doing so could have repercussions for all concerned, however, I fully support this idea.

[Click here to see the answer and comments.](#)

Key idea: You will notice in my own model essays that I don't always include a thesis statement – I only do this when I feel it is helpful or necessary. There is no strict rule about adding a thesis statement to your introduction. You should only include one if you are confident that you can make your position clear. Don't write this sentence until you have planned your main argument and you are sure of what you can prove or show in your essay, and make sure that it is a brief overview.

Listen again once or twice and make notes on the planner to try to recreate my plan. (You can go further and write out my essay if you find this helpful.) You can see my version on the next page.

Compare your notes to the plan I used for my essay:

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>General topic: High school children and community service Focus: High school children + the community Issue to discuss: Should it be compulsory in high school?</p> <p>My initial position: Yes</p>	
<p>Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community service • Helping people • High school children • Curriculum • The community 	
<p>Side A: Disagree: Should not be compulsory (neg)</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>The problems involved</p>	<p>Side B: Agree: Should be compulsory (benefits)</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>The potential benefits</p>
<p>1) Community service –helps the community, but supervising teenagers = more work +</p> <p>2) Teenagers – not all are mature enough ∴ may cause more problems not solve them</p> <p>3) High school curriculum – timetable already very full ∴ may not have time + academic pressure ∴ may not be practical / possible</p>	<p>1) Community service – Yes will be more work at first BUT they will improve and it will mean they will volunteer later as adults ∴ will help in long-term</p> <p>2) Teenagers – Yes, immature BUT the experience will make them mature and responsible + community minded = good opportunity to learn</p> <p>3) High school curriculum – Yes, they have academic pressure BUT good to escape this + will learn useful life skills not possible in classroom</p>
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>May cause problems and be impractical</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>Community and individuals benefit</p>
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points: Some initial problems but in the long-term the benefits are worth it – there is more to gain than lose.</p> <p>Question to answer: To what extent do you agree / disagree? My Final position: I agree with the idea</p>	

In the next exercises, we will focus on the language I used in this essay.

Language focus 1

The verb tenses, modal verbs, and adverbs you use are important in making your position clear throughout – remember, modals can tell the reader how sure you are that something *will*, *might*, or *could* happen. To practise this, fill in the gaps in the model essay below in a way that will make my position clear throughout. Use the verbs in the box and include any words in brackets. You will need to change the tense of the verbs and you may need to add any necessary modal verbs, auxiliary verbs, and prepositions. Write the answers on your worksheet.

have x 4	cause	be x 4	prove	help	work
need	solve	gain	agree	resist	make up
				ensure	

Many community services rely on people to volunteer their time and effort. Some people think that forcing high school students to take part in programmes like this is a good idea. Doing so ¹ _____ repercussions for all concerned.

Firstly, creating a programme that is compulsory ² _____ (certainly) an impact on the community and the children involved. Not all teenagers are mature enough for work like this. As a result, if they are expected to help the elderly, work on renovation projects, or teach younger children, the programme ³ _____ more problems than it ⁴ _____. The charities ⁵ _____ (also) extra work in supervising these students. In addition, high school students have a great deal of academic pressure, so adding more to their timetable ⁶ _____ (not) possible, especially for any with high academic ambitions. Thus, establishing this type of programme ⁷ _____ difficult.

Nevertheless, there ⁸ _____ (also) clear benefits. It is easy for teenagers to become focused only on their studies or their personal interests, and many would not normally choose to become involved in this type of community work. Thus, if it is made part of the standard curriculum, the students ⁹ _____ the opportunity to try something new. Furthermore, while it is true that many lack maturity, work of this nature ¹⁰ _____ them to develop a sense of responsibility, and teach them real-world skills that ¹¹ _____ very useful in their future career. Teaching teenagers to be more community-minded ¹² _____ (also) that older volunteers ¹³ _____ (eventually) less, or even retire. Therefore, even though both groups ¹⁴ _____ adapt, everyone taking part ¹⁵ _____ (more; likely) from the experience.

In conclusion, I ¹⁶ _____ (completely) this proposal. Although the idea of compulsory community service ¹⁷ _____ (initially) difficult to implement, and some ¹⁸ _____ the idea, its long-term benefits ¹⁹ _____ (surely) any short-term problems.

Listen again to check your answers:

[🔊 Click here to listen to the model answer again.](#)

Language focus 2

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below (NB they are in the same order as the text).

1. to do something willingly without payment or being forced	10. to benefit
2. negative effects	11. thinking about the community
3. you must do it; obligatory	12. to change
4. watching to make sure an activity is done safely or well	13. suggestion
5. normal, ordinary, typical	14. to put into operation / carry out
6. the subjects studied in school	15. to fight against something
7. (this) <u>type</u> (of work) – (work of this) _____	16. lasting a long time
8. something that applies to normal life	17. lasting a short time
9. participating	18. compensate for

Check your answers on the next page.

Answers

Language focus 1

Answers – (alternative answers are in brackets)

- 1) could have (may have / might have)
- 2) would **certainly** have
- 3) may cause (could cause)
- 4) solves
- 5) would **also** have
- 6) may **not** be
- 7) might prove difficult (could prove difficult / may prove difficult)
- 8) would **also** be ('there are also clear benefits' would indicate that this programme already exists or that you are very certain of this outcome; 'could also be' is less sure)
- 9) would have
- 10) would help ('could help' is less certain)
- 11) will be ('would / could be' are also possible, 'will be' shows the writer is more certain that these skills will help)
- 12) should **also** ensure ('would ensure' is more definite - the verb 'ensure' means 'to make sure/ to make certain') which seems odd to use with 'could' here)
- 13) can **eventually** work ('could eventually work' less is also possible)
- 14) would need **to**
- 15) is **more** likely **to** gain
- 16) completely agree **with**
- 17) may **initially** be
- 18) may resist
- 19) will **surely** make up **for**

Make a note of any prepositions that you forgot to add or got wrong and be sure to learn these. You can review the use of modals in lesson 3.3.

Language focus 2

Answers

1. to do something willingly, without payment or being forced - **volunteer**
2. negative effects – **ramifications**
3. you must do it; obligatory – **compulsory**
4. watching to make sure an activity is done safely or well – **supervising**
5. normal, ordinary, typical – **standard**
6. the subjects studied in school – (the school) **curriculum**
7. (this) type (of work) – (work of this) **nature**
8. something that applies to normal life – **real-world**
9. thinking about the community – **community-minded**
10. change – **adapt**
11. participate – **take part**
12. to benefit - **gain**
13. suggestion – **proposal**
14. to put into operation / carry out – **implement**
15. to fight against something – **resist**
16. lasting a long time – **long-term**
17. lasting a short time – **short-term**
18. to compensate for – **make up for**

You can see the completed model answer on the next page.

Model answer 1

Model Essay 1

Many community services rely on people to volunteer their time and effort. Some people think that forcing high school students to take part in programmes like this is a good idea. Doing so could have repercussions for all concerned.

Firstly, creating a programme that is compulsory would certainly have an impact on the community and the children involved. Not all teenagers are mature enough for work like this. As a result, if they are expected to help the elderly, work on renovation projects, or teach younger children, the programme may cause more problems than it solves. The charities would also have extra work in supervising these students. In addition, high school students have a great deal of academic pressure, so adding more to their timetable may not be possible, especially for any with high academic ambitions. Thus, establishing this type of programme might prove difficult.

Nevertheless, there would also be clear benefits. It is easy for teenagers to become focused only on their studies or their personal interests, and many would not normally choose to do this type of work. Thus, if it is made part of the standard curriculum, the students would have the opportunity to try something new. Furthermore, while it is true that many lack maturity, work of this nature would help them to develop a sense of responsibility, and teach them real-world skills that will be very useful in their future career. Teaching teenagers to be more community-minded should also ensure that older volunteers can eventually work less. Therefore, even though both groups would need to adapt, everyone taking part is more likely to gain from the experience.

In conclusion, I completely agree with this proposal. Although the idea of compulsory community service may initially be difficult to implement, and some may resist the idea, its long-term benefits will surely make up for any short-term problems. (312 words)

16.3 Problems and solutions

What about Problems and solutions questions?

Many people believe the approach to essay writing varies with different question 'types'. To show that you can use the same planning approach with any question, I have written a new version of this task:

In some countries, very few young people are willing to do unpaid community service (for example, working for a charity, improving the neighbourhood, or teaching sports to younger children).

What problems might this cause?

What do you think is the best way to solve these problems?

Comments on the task

- This task asks you two questions:

What problems might this cause?

What is the best way to solve these problems?

Other variations on questions like this are:

Why might this be the case?

What measures could be taken to solve this problem?

- Or you may be given an argument that presents 'the only' or 'the best' solution to a problem and then asks you to discuss whether this *is* the only or best way to solve it. The use of modals, or words like 'best' and 'only', show where you need to make your position clear. In other words, you may need to write about:

why you believe a problem is occurring

what you think could be done to solve it

what you think is the best way to solve it

why you think that xyz is not the only / best way to solve it

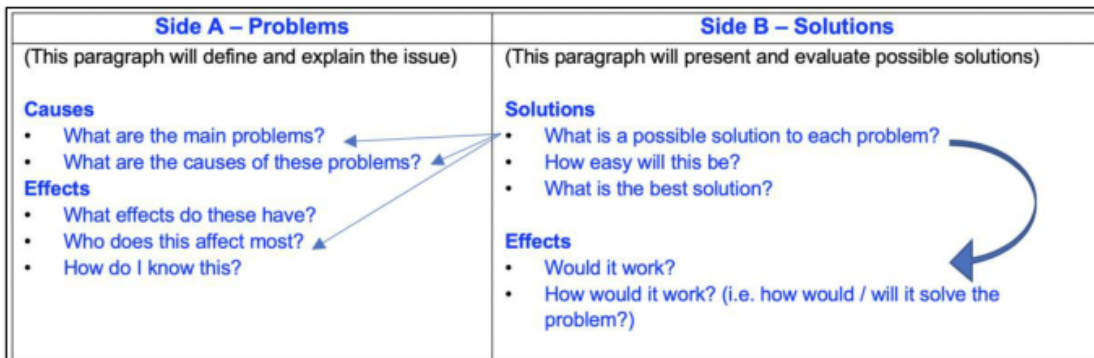
In effect, you will present and discuss the causes and effects of something, and you can review the language for this in Lessons 3 and 4.

Planning and Themes

- When planning, you should follow the same approach as before. The problems and solutions will create your two 'sides', and you should be sure to include themes such as *problems, causes, effects, solutions* in your headings.
- With many of the previous essays, each paragraph has mainly discussed the same themes. However, with questions like this, you may find that there are different themes in each paragraph, because the causes of the problems may be different to the solutions. Again, it is important to be flexible – don't try to make the essay question fit into one pattern you have learned.

Key idea: Don't force yourself to follow the same patterns of thinking or planning in each essay. Be flexible in your approach and adapt it to the question you are given, which will be different each time. In some essays, you may find that you can use the same themes in each paragraph, in others, you may find they are different in each paragraph.

- As with all tasks, you will then need to gather evidence for your argument by asking yourself questions like this:



- As we saw with advantages and disadvantages, seeing the causes of the problem next to the possible solutions can help you think of ideas. For example, if one of the causes you identify is 'a lack of money', then a logical solution is to 'find a way to get more money'.
- Once you have a possible solution, you can evaluate this by commenting on how easy or difficult it will be to achieve, or how effective the solution *will / would / or could be*. Therefore, it is important to think about how sure you are about each of your possible solutions. Remember, do not make a firm prediction (using *will* or *would*) unless you have knowledge or experience to support an idea (see lesson 3.3 to review this).
- Finally, even if you are not asked this in the question, deciding on the *best* solution is a nice way to conclude your essay.

On the next page, you will find my plan for this essay.

Look at my plan for this essay. Notice that I don't have an initial position because I need to think through the problems and evaluate the solutions first.

Pauline's Essay planner	
Introduction General topic: Young people and community service Focus: Young people + the community Issue to discuss: What can be done to encourage more young people to do community service? My initial position: ?	
Themes • Community service • Young people • Problems • Effects • Solutions	
Side A: The problems	Side B: Possible solutions
Main topic of this paragraph:	Main topic of this paragraph:
The problem - causes and effects	The possible solutions
1) Community service = helping the vulnerable (homeless, elderly) + making public places nice ∴ is important 2) Problem = Young people not involved (why? Lack of Role models? No incentive?) 3) effects – if they are not involved places deteriorate, elderly suffer + older volunteers have more pressure ∴ the whole community will suffer, not just elderly etc 4) Community – if young people not involved there could be a cultural shift away from helping others = not a healthy community	1) Community service – make it compulsory? BUT will not be popular and may not be practical 2) Young people – need an incentive + good role models. E.g. learn useful skills, get job references 3) Community – whole community needs to be involved e.g. + encourage employers to value this type of service + when recruiting (look for this on resume /CV)
What did I show or prove? Link to the question?	What did I show or prove? Link to the question?
Important to find a solution	Can only be solved by getting all involved
Conclusion - Summary of my main points: Benefits for everyone, not just the charities Question to answer: What are the best ways to solve this? My Final position: Best way to solve = a community approach + offer incentives	

Here is the introduction and conclusion to my essay. Use the ideas in my plan to write the body paragraphs. Then compare your version to the model answer on the last page of this lesson.

Introduction

Community service is a useful way of helping in areas where the local government is unable to. However, as it is unpaid, the idea is often not very appealing to young people. This causes problems that it is important to find solutions to.

Conclusion

In conclusion, community service is an important part of any society and everyone suffers if it fails. In my view, the best way to encourage young people to get involved is to offer good incentives, and to show just how important it is to everyone.

Extra practice

- Time yourself and write your own plan and essay based on this question:

In some countries, very few young people are willing to do unpaid community service (for example, working for a charity, improving the neighbourhood, or teaching sports to younger children).

What problems might this cause?

What do you think is the best way to solve these problems?

- If you have a test buddy, swap essays and try to assess your partners essay. To see if the essay is band 7, think about the following:

Task response

- Does the essay:
 - address all parts of the task?
 - Present a clear position throughout?
 - Present, extend, and support main ideas? (Does the writer explain why they believe this?)
- Are the conclusions clear? (Is there anything confusing for the reader?)

Coherence and cohesion

- Are the ideas organised logically?
- Is there clear progression in the argument?
- Are the cohesive devices used effectively? (i.e. as a helpful signpost for the reader)
- Is there a range of cohesive devices?
- Is there a clear central topic within each paragraph?

Lexical resource

- Is the vocabulary helpful in explaining the writer's ideas clearly?
- Does the writer mainly use vocabulary that they understand well?
- Is the style of the language appropriately formal?

Grammatical range and accuracy

- Is there a variety of grammatical structures or do the sentences follow a similar pattern and sound repetitive?
- Are there only a few grammatical mistakes?

- Suggest any changes that your partner could make and explain why you think this would be helpful.
- Look at the model answer on the next page and make a note of any language you would like to learn.

Model answer 2

Model Answer 2

Community service is a useful way of helping in areas where the local government is unable to. However, as it is unpaid, the idea is often not very appealing to young people. This causes problems that it is important to find solutions to.

Community service and charitable programmes generally help to take care of the most vulnerable in society. This can mean providing food and care for the poor, the homeless, or the elderly, or it may mean improving the public spaces where they live. If young people do not become involved in this work, the responsibility falls to older people, who may have the time but not the physical strength or resources needed. As a result, the vulnerable will suffer and the places where they live will eventually deteriorate. Unless the problem is solved, the culture of taking care of others could disappear. A community where people only think about themselves is not a healthy one, so it is important to find a solution.

There are several ways to approach this problem. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is to make community service compulsory for all high school students. While this would go a long way to solving the problem, it may not be easy to implement, and is likely to be unpopular. A second, and more successful approach, would be to find a way to encourage younger people to help. For example, by making sure they receive training, and learn useful skills in return for their efforts. Participants could also be given good references to improve their employment prospects. This would mean even more if employers actively looked for this type of experience when recruiting. Therefore, an effective solution requires more than the efforts of young people.

In conclusion, community service is an important part of any society and everyone suffers if it fails. In my view, the best way to encourage young people to get involved is to offer good incentives, and to show just how important it is to everyone. (333)

Lesson 17 – Test practice 5

Academic task 3 – Dealing with more complex test questions

With each task so far, we have been able to plan in a very similar way, and I have encouraged you to think in a simpler way about the tasks so that you can develop basic planning skills. However, there are several more points to consider, and the tasks in the next few lessons will show you how to be more flexible in your planning and thinking.

Some writing tasks are more complex than they initially seem, which makes it doubly important to think carefully about the question before you begin. You will reach a high level when you can consistently answer the question well in 40 minutes, whether the topic is general or abstract, and whether the task itself presents a short, seemingly simple argument, or a longer, more complex one.

Key idea: Higher level candidates are flexible enough to adapt their approach to any essay question. Take the time to identify key details in the question and adapt your planning accordingly.

17.1 Thinking and planning

The next task can be found on page 77 of *Cambridge IELTS 9*. The question says:

Some people say that the best way to improve public health is by increasing the number of sports facilities. Others, however, say that this would have little effect on public health and that other measures are required.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Comments on the task

- Although this task *looks* similar to others we have done, taking some time to read and think about the task shows that it is not as simple as discussing two viewpoints then giving your own opinion. The two arguments being made in this question include the following three ideas:
 - 'the best way' to deal with a problem
 - whether or not this would have 'little effect'
 - whether 'other measures' are needed.

As you can see, these ideas are all related to problems, solutions, and cause and effect. Therefore, you need to plan and write this essay in a similar way to the problems and solutions essay we saw in lesson 16.

- When you are given 2 viewpoints to discuss, it is best to see these as the two sides to your essay. This means that, in this essay, you will discuss:
 - A) whether adding sports facilities is the best solution, and
 - B) whether other measures are needed.
- This task is asking you to discuss 'public health'. So, the focus of your essay will be on the general public, or people in general.

Spend up to 10 minutes thinking about this issue and planning your answer to this question. Ensure that your planning includes ideas related to cause and effect, and problems and solutions, and don't worry if you have different themes in each paragraph. Don't forget to add 'Give my own opinion' to your conclusion section to remind you to do this as well. When you have finished, look at my plan on the next page.

Look at my plan for this essay and compare it to yours:

Pauline's Essay planner		
<p>Introduction</p> <p>General topic: Public health (needs to be improved) (obesity?) Focus: People in general [the public] Issue to discuss: Will adding sports facilities help ? is something else needed? My initial position: Yes and Yes</p>		<p>Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health problems • Cause and effect • People • Sport • solutions
<p>Side A: Will adding sports facilities help?</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>Are sports facilities needed / effective?</p>	<p>Side B: Other measures required?</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>Other possible measures</p>	
<p>1) Public health = many unhealthy – this assumes lack of sports facilities = the cause Will it help?</p> <p>2) Sports facilities – will adding more help? – no BEC people can exercise without special equipment (e.g. jogging) ∴ lack of access to facilities is not the cause</p> <p>3) The public / people – they may use the new facilities but many won't (probably only those who already exercise) ∴ just adding equipment won't help</p>	<p>1) Public health – need to understand causes to solve the problem</p> <p>2) Sport – people are unhealthy because of several things diet + stress + no time + no exercise ∴</p> <p>3) People – need to change their attitude to work (take time out) and diet (no fast food) → with more time people may exercise more</p> <p>BUT – not everyone can miss out on work</p>	
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>Will not solve the problem alone</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>There is no simple solution</p>	
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points: More sports facilities nice but too simplistic - will only work if people also change their lifestyle – need their cooperation. Question to answer: give your own opinion</p> <p>My Final position: I think sports facilities are a good idea but not the best solution – I also think other measures are needed</p>		

Spend up to 20 minutes writing your essay. For extra practice, after studying my plan, you could try to write my essay too, then compare your version to the way that I explain these ideas in my model.

17.2 The language of cause and effect

As we saw in lesson 16, these essays force you to use the language of cause and effect. Understanding how ideas are connected together is very important for this. To practise, fill in the gaps in the body paragraphs of my essay by selecting the correct extract from the boxes below. Think about meaning, logic, and about coherence and cohesion (particularly referencing, and how ideas are connected together). Look back at my plan to help.

Public health is a growing concern, with many countries reporting increasing levels of obesity. Some believe the problem can be addressed by adding more sports facilities, while others think this may not be enough. A closer look at the problem will help in assessing these views.

Adding sports facilities would certainly be an attractive idea to some. However, (1) _____
 _____ In reality, (2) _____
 _____. Among other key factors (3) _____
 _____. Furthermore, (4) _____
 _____. Thus, (5) _____
 _____.

Clearly, other measures are required to improve public health. If (6) _____
 _____. This means that, (7) _____
 _____. In this way, (8) _____
 _____. The issue of diet (9) _____
 _____. Nevertheless, (10) _____
 _____. Seemingly, (11) _____
 _____.

In conclusion, in my view, giving time-poor people greater access to sports facilities will not be effective and is too simplistic a solution. Other measures are clearly required, but any action taken to improve public health requires a change in lifestyle, and this needs the cooperation of everyone involved. (337 words)

Extracts from body paragraph 1

- A. sophisticated equipment is not essential for getting fit; walking or running in the streets would also achieve this.
- B. if a lack of facilities is not responsible for current health problems, simply adding more will not solve them.
- C. a combination of factors are to blame for a great deal of public health issues, and a lack of exercise is only one of these.
- D. this proposal does assume that the main reason people are unhealthy is that they lack access to such facilities.
- E. are poor diet, work stress, and a lack of time to address these.

Extracts from body paragraph 2

- F. these solutions will take time and, for those who cannot reduce their working hours, they are likely to be ineffective.
- G. when it comes to solving complex health problems, there is no simple solution.
- H. people lack the time to take care of themselves, then we need to find a way to address this.
- I. can be tackled by persuading people to cook nutritious meals themselves rather than choosing a faster alternative.
- J. as a society, we need to encourage the idea that taking time out from the pressures of work has health benefits.
- K. not only will work stress be reduced, but people will also have more time to exercise.

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

You can see the complete model on the next page.

Model answer 1

Public health is a growing concern, with many countries reporting increasing levels of obesity. Some believe the problem can be addressed by adding more sports facilities, while others think this may not be enough. A closer look at the problem will help in assessing these views.

Adding sports facilities would certainly be an attractive idea to some. However, this proposal does assume that the main reason people are unhealthy is that they lack access to such facilities. In reality, a combination of factors are to blame for a great deal of public health issues, and a lack of exercise is only one of these. Among other key factors are poor diet, work stress, and a lack of time to address them. Furthermore, sophisticated equipment is not essential for getting fit; walking or running in the streets would also achieve this. Thus, if a lack of facilities is not responsible for current health problems, simply adding more will not solve them.

Clearly, other measures are required to improve public health. If people lack the time to take care of themselves, then we need to find a way to address this. This means that, as a society, we need to encourage the idea that taking time out from the pressures of work has health benefits. In this way, not only will work stress be reduced, but people will also have more time to exercise. The issue of diet can be tackled by persuading people to cook nutritious meals themselves rather than choosing a faster alternative. Nevertheless, these solutions will take time and, for those who cannot reduce their working hours, are likely to be ineffective. Seemingly, when it comes to solving complex health problems, there is no simple solution.

In conclusion, in my view, giving time-poor people greater access to sports facilities will not be effective and is too simplistic a solution. Other measures are clearly required, but any action taken to improve public health requires a change in lifestyle, and this needs the cooperation of everyone involved. (336 words)

Make a note of any new language you would like to learn connected to food, diet, or health.

17.3 A positive or a negative development?

A final possible task is one that presents you with a claim about a change that has happened (or is happening), and asks you to say whether you think that this change is positive or negative. Below, I have altered our task to give some practice with this:

In some places, fast food, prepared meals, and sugary drinks are now sold in more shops and at lower prices than in the past.

Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?

Comments on this task

- As with the problems and solutions essay, you might be asked one question or two. So, you may also be asked 'What problems might this cause?' or 'Why might this be the case?' Any extra questions are added for your benefit, to help you get more ideas to write about.
- Again, changing this claim into a question helps to pinpoint the main issue. For example: *Is it better or worse that fast food etc is now cheaper and easier to buy?*
- Again, we can see this as a question that combines two types of argument: cause and effect, and advantages and disadvantages. It is effectively asking you to discuss the benefits and challenges that a change is bringing, so your argument can be planned as follows:

Side A – the positive effects of this change

Side B – the problems or negative effects this change is causing (or has caused)

- In this way, you will be able to present an argument to support your overall position, which might be 1) that it is a positive development (because of the advantages it brings / has brought), or 2) that this is a negative development (because of its disadvantages). As always, I like to begin with the weaker side of the argument (the one that I disagree with) and finish with the argument that supports my overall position. As with the advantages and disadvantages essays, the side you feel is a weaker argument (and that you disagree with) can be seen as the counterargument to your argument.
- If you cannot think of any positive effects of a development, try to visualise or imagine other parts of the world and how this trend might affect people there – think of much poorer countries or much richer countries. If this doesn't help, remember that your perspective and experience will affect your response, and you can turn this into a key idea in your argument, just remember to make your perspective clear. For example, if you can only think of the negative effects of a development, then you could write something like this:

This trend has had such a negative effect in my country that it is impossible to imagine that it has had a positive effect anywhere else in the world.

Nevertheless, you should not see this as a neat sentence to cut and paste into any essay like this. The ideas you present must support it. In other words, you would need to *prove* that the trend or development has only had negative effects, and you would need to do this without repeating the same main ideas.

- You will need to talk about the topic of food and diet in this essay, so it is a good idea to review this vocabulary before you begin.

Use the **T.P.W.C** approach to write a plan for this essay. Aim to **Think** and **Plan** for up to 10 minutes, **Write** for up to 20 minutes, and **Check** for up to 10 minutes. When you have finished, compare your answer to the model answer on the next page.

Model Answer

Model 2

Our diet is becoming increasingly unhealthy. This is reflected in the fact that cheap, fast food, and sugary drinks are now found in many shops around the world. However, this low cost and convenience comes at a cost.

Undoubtedly, the availability of prepared meals and canned drinks has some advantages. This type of food is abundant because it appeals to our taste buds. People would not eat it so often if they did not crave the taste. The low cost also means that people on a lower income can afford to feed their families, and it is made even more appealing because it also saves time in the kitchen. There are now so many big businesses based on producing this type of food and drink that many workers are dependent on the selling or making of it, and this industry is a key employer of many lower income families. These advantages show that this development is likely to continue for some time.

Nevertheless, the negative effects are significant. The low cost of this type of food means that it has become more of a staple diet for many people. It is widely acknowledged that processed and sugary foods are unhealthy, so their widespread consumption is concerning. Such food contains many additives, offers little nutrition, and is largely seen as responsible for the growing obesity problems around the world. In addition, there are links to diabetes, all of which affects the economy as well as putting pressure on the healthcare system. Ultimately, the problems associated with this type of food have an impact on everyone.


In conclusion, the availability and convenience of this type of food mean that it is likely to be here to stay. Nevertheless, the long-term health effects show that, on the whole, this is a negative development. Finding a way to increase the cost would go some way to solving this. (314)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below (NB they are in the same order as the text).

- 1) containing lots of sugar
- 2) there is a lot of it
- 3) the part of your tongue that detects flavour – the taste
- 4) to experience a strong feeling of wanting something (usually food, but it is also used with 'attention')
- 5) people who do not earn very much are _____
- 6) needing the support of something or someone
- 7) the main food eaten (usually within a country or region)
- 8) eating or use
- 9) chemicals added to food and drink (often to add taste)
- 10) nourishment; food (as a means of fuelling the body)
- 11) a country's system for taking care of medical problems
- 12) not going away

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Extra practice 

Look carefully at the four model answers in lessons 16 and 17. You can do this in several stages, focusing on one particular criterion each time. Pay particular attention to the following:

Task response:

Focus on the argument and how I made my position clear. Notice the role that language (both vocabulary and grammar) play in that. For example, the use of modals, choice of vocabulary etc.

Coherence and cohesion:

Think about the planning and organisation of ideas, and identify the one central idea or topic in each paragraph. Notice the use of cohesive devices, including: referencing; the use of synonyms to refer back to a previous idea; the use of connecting words and phrases. The PEEL structure.

Grammatical range:

Notice different points of grammar. For example: nouns and whether they have an article or not; verb tenses; prepositions; modals; relative clauses; the use of commas.

Lexical resource:

Notice the use of synonyms throughout the essay as well as when it is more natural to occasionally repeat key words. Look for umbrella terms you can learn (you can review this idea in lesson 10). Make a note of vocabulary you would like to learn.

Lesson 18 Test practice 6 – Academic writing task 4

Dealing with more abstract topics

18.1 More abstract topics

This test question provides an opportunity to cover one final point about thinking and planning – dealing with more abstract topics and themes. The question can be found on page 102 of *Cambridge IELTS 9*.

Every year, several languages die out. Some people think that this is not important because life will be easier if there are fewer languages in the world.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Comments on the task

- This question contains a high-level phrasal verb: 'to die out'. To make sure that even lower levels can answer, the question provides help with the meaning by telling us that that this means '*there are fewer languages in the world*'. Remember, if you are worried that the task contains language you do not know, always look for the help within the question.
- The question begins with a fact: '*Every year, several languages die out*'. This sets the context for the argument made in the second sentence but also gives you key information for your essay. Although you do not need to discuss or debate this fact, you should not ignore it – it should be the context for all the ideas in your essay. Many of the essays I see based on this question assume that this task is about the English language, and often misinterpret the argument being made as: '*Everyone in the world should speak the same language*'. As a result, they lower their Task response score by not addressing the issue raised in the question.
- The focus here is a little more difficult to identify. Look at the question, who or what do you think you should you focus on in your answer? (You'll see the answer in the next bullet point).
- In answering this question, we will need to discuss the impact that the loss of languages has. Clearly, this will affect the people whose language is dying out, often these are people living in more remote areas. However, the people offering their opinion in the question, are talking about the impact this has on the world in general: 'life will be easier if there are fewer languages in the world'. Therefore, the focus is on both one specific group (the people losing their language) and the world at large (everyone else). The ideas you have for this task are more likely to be based on abstract themes. Rather than *money, food, or socializing*, we will discuss 'life', 'society', and 'culture'. This adds another level of difficulty, because many candidates struggle to discuss ideas like this.
- The question tells us that, '*Some people think that (the loss of languages) is not important*'. In other words, we are being told about an attitude or reaction to something, and we will need to discuss this attitude in our essay. We are also told these people think that '*life will be easier*' without these languages, so they are also commenting on the effect or impact that this will have. Thus, again, we need to consider cause and effect in this essay.

Use the **T.P.W.C** approach to write a plan for this essay. **Think** and **Plan** for up to 10 minutes, **Write** for up to 20 minutes, and **Check** for up to 10 minutes. Keep a record of your time for each stage.

18.2 My model

My timing for this essay was:

- 8 mins Thinking and Planning
- 15 mins Writing
- 13 minutes Checking and editing

Here is my plan:

Pauline's Essay planner	
<p>Introduction</p> <p>General topic: Disappearing languages Focus: people in remote areas + people in general Issue to discuss: Is it important that languages are dying out? Does it make life easier? My initial position: I completely disagree – yes, it is important</p>	
<p>Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Culture • Changing world • People • Communication 	
<p>Side A: Life is easier / the loss is unimportant</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>How life is made easier (benefits of loss)</p> <p>1) Language – use it every day – business communication and travel → transactions easier if people understand each other + problems can be solved faster</p> <p>2) Culture – can understand the culture</p> <p>3) Changing world = changes to language are inevitable (more travel, more international business → need to communicate more)</p> <p>4) People - easier for business people and travellers</p>	<p>Side B: The loss is important</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>The negative effects of this loss</p> <p>1) Language - Yes, business is easier, BUT language is used for more than this e.g. express feelings + culture + history</p> <p>2) Culture – language used to express culture (poems, literature, history = adds variety / makes the world richer) = part of identity of individuals and community</p> <p>3) People - ∴ for the people involved this is a big loss + For the world, this is a big loss</p>
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>Easier for certain people / situations</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>Some people are far more affected by the loss than others</p>
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points: Yes, it makes business easier but language adds variety and makes the world richer.</p> <p>Question to answer: To what extent do you agree / disagree?</p> <p>My Final position: I completely disagree</p>	

Length

My final essay is 321 words. At the first draft stage, it was 350 words. As with each of my essays, editing often involves cutting out words or ideas. This is part of making my main points very clear. I could go further and cut more, but doing this would be less helpful to you, and would likely remove some of the clearer signposting. The slightly longer versions in this book still represent band 9.

Key idea: Some native speakers, and lower level candidates say that their essays are often a little short. If you find that you cannot always write 250 words, then you are probably not planning enough, or not connecting and explaining your ideas clearly enough. At the edit stage, if you find you often need to add extra words or extra ideas, then you are beginning to write too soon.

Read through my essay and then complete the three exercises based on it.

Model answer

In some parts of the world, native languages are being lost as the world develops and evolves. Some believe that this is unimportant and even see it as an advantage. This essay will discuss whether the loss of languages should be cause for concern.

Certain aspects of everyday life are made easier through sharing a common language. First and foremost, business transactions are much simpler when the two parties concerned can understand each other well. Travel problems can also be dealt with much faster when there is mutual understanding. Thanks to globalization, these types of communication are increasing, and could be seen as largely responsible for the disappearance of languages in more remote areas. If people in those areas want to do business with others, to avoid frustrations, they are forced to adopt the more widely used languages of the world. Thus, with each new generation, their native tongue becomes both less useful and less used. Thus, sadly, the need to make life simpler makes the loss of some languages inevitable.

Nevertheless, language has a multitude of uses that go far beyond tourism and business communication. Firstly, our native tongue is used to express our deepest feelings and emotions. These are much more difficult to convey when using a second language. Language also plays an important part in our culture and identity, uniting us as a community. Thus, when a language is lost, part of the community and culture also disappears. This must be an enormous loss for the people concerned. Clearly, some people are affected far more than others by the disappearance of a language.

In conclusion, while it is true that having fewer languages benefits the world of business, and makes transactions easier, I completely disagree with the view that the continued loss of languages is unimportant. The variety of native languages is what makes the world a richer place, and any loss of this kind should not be dismissed lightly.
(323 words)

1) Thesis statements

In the previous lesson 16.2 we saw that a thesis statement must reflect your overall argument and make your position clear. Think about the overall argument and position in this essay. What can you add to the final sentence in my introduction to make my thesis clear?

[Click here to see my answer.](#)

On the next page you will find 2 language-based exercises.

2) Language focus: grammar

This essay provides a good opportunity to think about verbs and tenses, and the way that accuracy can have an impact on how clear your argument and ideas are. Without looking back at my essay, change the verbs in brackets into the correct tense. You will need to think about active / passive use, tense, modals, and verb / subject agreement. Write your answers on the worksheet.

In some parts of the world, native languages ¹ _____ (lose) as the world ² _____ (develop) and ³ _____ (evolve). Some believe that this is unimportant and even see it as an advantage. This essay will discuss whether the loss of languages should be cause for concern.

Certain aspects of everyday life ⁴ _____ (make) through sharing a common language. First and foremost, business transactions are much simpler when the two parties concerned can understand each other well. Travel problems can also ⁵ _____ (deal with) much faster when there is mutual understanding. Thanks to globalization, these types of communication ⁶ _____ (increase), and could ⁷ _____ (see) as largely responsible for the disappearance of languages in more remote areas. If people in those areas ⁸ _____ (want) to do business with others, to avoid frustrations, they ⁹ _____ (adopt) the more widely used languages of the world. Thus, with each new generation, their native tongue becomes both less useful and less used. Thus, sadly, the need to make life simpler makes the loss of some languages inevitable.

Nevertheless, language has a multitude of uses that go far beyond tourism and business communication. Firstly, our native tongue ¹⁰ _____ (use) to express our deepest feelings and emotions. These are much more difficult to convey when using a second language. Language also ¹¹ _____ (play) an important part in our culture and identity, uniting us as a community. Thus, when a language is lost, part of the community and culture also ¹² _____ (disappear). This must be an enormous loss for the people concerned. Clearly, some people ¹³ _____ (affect) far more than others by the disappearance of a language.

In conclusion, while it is true that having fewer languages ¹⁴ _____ (benefit) the world of business, and ¹⁵ _____ (make) transactions easier, I completely disagree with the view that the continued loss of languages is unimportant. The variety of native languages is what makes the world a richer place, and any loss of this kind should not ¹⁶ _____ (dismiss) lightly.

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Now look back at the different tenses you used in your essay. Do you need to make any changes?

3) Language focus: vocabulary

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below.

- 1) a reason to be worried
- 2) understanding each other
- 3) places that are far away
- 4) accept or start to use something new
- 5) the language you learn from birth
- 6) cannot be avoided
- 7) a large number of
- 8) to communicate or express
- 9) bringing people together
- 10) buying or selling something
- 11) not important
- 12) to decide that something is not important

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

18.3 More abstract themes

The following task is a variation on the task we saw in lesson 11. You may be able to adapt some of your ideas and the language you learned when writing the previous version, so review it now to help.

Read the question carefully. Identify the key issue and any important words and phrases that indicate the argument being made.

Young people often copy the behaviour of famous people, so celebrities should only be allowed to advertise healthy food or drink and should not encourage unhealthy habits such as smoking.

Do you agree or disagree?

Comments on this task

- The key words and phrases in this task are, '*should only be allowed*' and '*should not encourage*'. These phrases tell you the argument being made in the question, which you need to be sure to respond to in your answer.
- This question demonstrates the need to read carefully before you start. If you read it too quickly, you might decide that the main topic here is healthy and unhealthy food and drink. However, a closer look shows that this argument essentially states that limits should be imposed on what celebrities can do because of the influence that they have on young people. Thus, this essay again involves discussing more abstract themes or ideas such as, *the influence of celebrities, personal freedom, responsibility, making choices, showing good judgement and bad judgement*. Again, themes like this can be difficult to write about in a clear way, so think carefully about the ideas you have in your plan.

Spend no more than 10 minutes writing a plan for this essay. Then compare your plan to mine, which you can find on the next page.

My plan:

Pauline's Essay planner		
<p>Introduction</p> <p>General topic: Young people and celebrities as role models Focus: Young people + celebrities Issue to discuss: Should celebrities be allowed to advertise unhealthy products? My initial position: Yes and no</p>		<p>Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrity influence • Freedom • Role models • Choices • responsibility
<p>Side A: (Agree) Yes – limit this</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>The influence of celebrities – negative effect</p>	<p>Side B: (disagree) No – free to choose</p> <p>Main topic of this paragraph:</p> <p>Personal freedom</p>	
<p>1) Celebrities and influence –earn a lot of money from advertising ∴ they are role models (= can be good and bad influence) ∴</p> <p>2) Responsibility → need to be aware that they are role models ∴</p> <p>3) Choices need to be careful with choices they make</p>	<p>1) Freedom – Yes, celebrities must be careful BUT deserve freedom / privacy too</p> <p>2) Responsibility – BUT young people have responsibility too → they must learn not to just follow and copy</p> <p>3) Choices – need to learn to make good choices (including good role models!)</p>	
<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>Celebrities need to be aware and careful</p>	<p>What did I show or prove? Link to the question?</p> <p>Young people need to be responsible too</p>	
<p>Conclusion - Summary of my main points: Both need to be responsible for their choices and actions</p> <p>Question to answer: To what extent do you agree / disagree?</p> <p>My Final position: Partly agree – celebrities should not advertise unhealthy things / but they should be allowed freedom to choose for themselves</p>		

Spend 20 minutes writing this essay using either your plan or my plan. Spend 10 minutes checking your answer, and then compare it to my model essay on the next page.

Model Answer

Read the model answer and make a note of any of the language used to talk about more abstract themes and be sure to practise with these in your timed essay practice.

Model answer 2

Young people look up to celebrities and can be easily influenced by them. Because of this, some people believe that there should be restrictions on what celebrities can advertise, or on how they behave. In my view, this seems a little unreasonable.

It is true that celebrities have a lot of influence. Brands pay them large sums of money to use their products in the knowledge that this will increase sales. These companies know that young people in particular want to copy their heroes. However, not all of these businesses offer healthy choices. Thus, famous people also sometimes promote less desirable behaviour. As a society, we need young people to follow good role models, and so celebrities need to understand that accepting money from advertising means that they are acting in this capacity. Therefore, the famous need to be aware of their role in society and make good choices based on this.

Nevertheless, the proposal to restrict celebrities in some way may go too far. While they should behave responsibly when in the public eye, they should also be allowed the freedom to make their own decisions. Furthermore, if we believe that young people will always copy the behaviour of others, even when this is unwise, that indicates a different problem: the need for young people to learn how to think for themselves. Thus, rather than asking celebrities to change their lifestyle, we should teach the young to take responsibility for their life choices.

In conclusion, I can only partly agree with this view. Although celebrities should not promote unhealthy behaviour, I believe they have the right to choose for themselves how they earn money or spend their free time. It is far more important to teach young people to show their own good judgment than to limit the freedom of others. (302)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below (NB they are in the same order as the text)

1. admire or respect
2. have an effect on someone or something
3. limits
4. encourage
5. unwanted
6. holding a position or job
7. (be) seen in the media
8. stupid, likely to cause problems
9. the way you live
10. the ability to make good decisions

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Extra practice

- Writing about more abstract topics is difficult. Make a note of any ideas that you struggle to explain, or you can't find the words for, then be sure to study the relevant vocabulary so that you can be more flexible in your writing. Study the vocabulary from the model answers in this lesson. Pay particular attention to the words used to express more abstract ideas.
- Look back over some of the essays you wrote in lessons 10 to 19 and focus on the tenses you used. Look for problems in verb / subject agreement (particularly when using the simple present). Think about whether the tenses you used are accurate. Make sure that you don't overuse the passive.
- Look at the tenses used in the model essays in this book and think about the tenses used and the effect the tense has on the meaning, and how the tense can help to make the position clear. Do some study of tenses if you feel unsure. Raymond Murphy's *English Grammar in Use* is an excellent resource for this.

Lesson 19 – Overview and Review

19.1 Planning – an overview of the approach to each question

As we have seen, to form a valid argument, you need to gather evidence and then think about what this evidence shows. We have also seen that inventing this evidence is not a good idea. We can apply these ideas to the writing tasks and answers we have worked on so far. Using these as our evidence, we can reach the following logical conclusion about the writing task 2: the task itself can vary in several ways, but there are some constants that will help you to get the best score that you can.

These variables and constants can be summed up in this way:

Variables in the task		Constants
<p>Question types: Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?</p> <p>Discuss both views and give your own opinion.</p> <p>To what extent do you agree or disagree?</p> <p>Is this a positive or a negative development?</p> <p>What might be the causes of this? What measures can be taken to solve this?</p>	<p>The Focus – who or what does this affect? can be people in general or a specific group (e.g. celebrities / young people / workers) or it can be a thing (society / culture / attitudes / business / nature etc.)</p> <hr/> <p>The topic – this can be abstract (responsibility / duty / attitudes / choices) or more concrete (work / money / travel / shopping) and can also be a combination of the two (e.g. attitudes towards work)</p> <hr/> <p>The issue – this can be simple (<i>Some people think A is better than B</i>) or more complex (<i>A has little effect. B is a better solution to the problems caused by C</i>)</p>	<p>You will always need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address the specific issue in the question • write about it in the context of the topic, and • in relation to the people / thing it has an impact on <p>To do this, you will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formulate your own opinion about the issue • think about why you hold this opinion • think about why it is a valid opinion • explain this reasoning clearly in your argument

This table shows that it is important to identify the focus, topic, and issue, in each task. You should see these as a stimulus that you need to respond to.

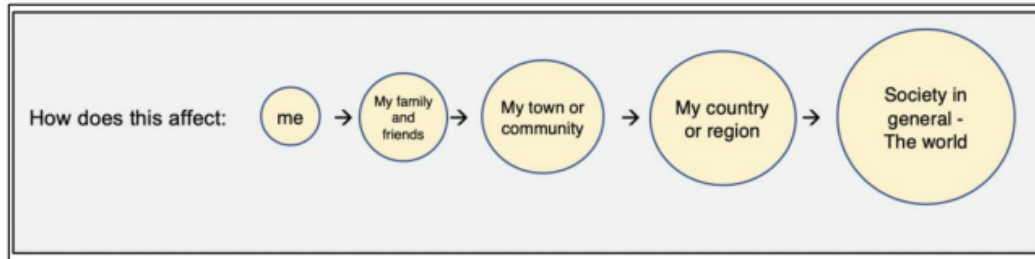
A good warm up activity for any writing practice is to spend a few moments identifying the focus, topic, and issue in the tasks from any test practice books you have. Be sure to practise with as wide a variety of tasks as possible. Notice that this variety is determined by *all* of the different variables within the task and not by the question type alone. Make sure to practise working on tasks that focus on: 1) people in general, 2) specific groups of people, and 3) more abstract things (e.g. business / society / culture etc.) – I have tried to vary this as much as possible in the timed test practice questions in the final lesson.

Key idea: Many people organise their practice and approach to a question according to the question type. However, this is only one part of the task – each of the other elements are just as important and must be taken into account when it comes to your thinking and planning. There is no magical ‘formula’ for each question ‘type’.

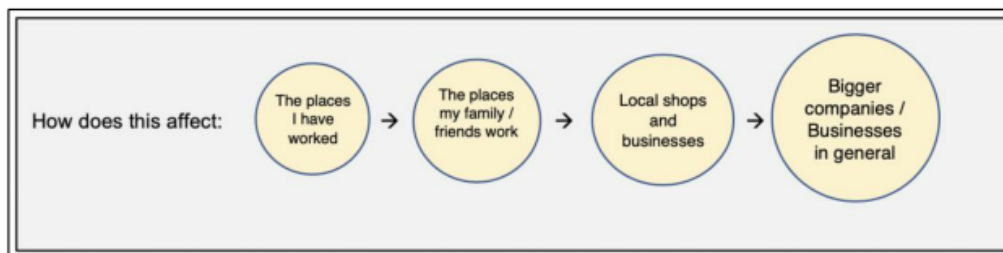
Remember, when it comes to thinking and planning, being thorough and logical is more important than being fast. Approaching your thinking in the same way for each practice essay that you do, will help you draw on these skills and strategies in the test.

Thinking strategies

- 1) When you see a new test question, begin by processing it and organising it into: 1) the focus, 2) the topic, 3) the issue, and 4) the task. This helps break the question down into more manageable parts. Instead of panicking, you are taking control of the task.
- 2) Identify themes within the statement you are given, or themes related to the issue. This will give you a logical starting point for your brainstorming and will help organise your paragraphs logically.
- 3) Think about the issue and its impact. Begin by thinking small (the personal impact) and finish by thinking about the bigger impact this issue has.



If the task focuses on something other than people, then you can adapt this idea. For example, if the focus is on businesses:



Or, if the focus is something like 'animals', your smaller thinking would begin with animals within cities, move on to animals in their wider habitat, and then finally think of nature as a whole.

Planning strategies

- 1) Spend up to 10 minutes thinking and planning – remember, this is a good investment of your time and is an essential part of the writing process.
- 2) Organise the ideas you have based on your themes. Get more evidence and reach general conclusions about the ideas you have by asking questions like this:

- Who or What does this affect?
- How? (What is the effect or impact?)
- How do I know this?
- What does this show or mean? (What lesson can we all learn from this?)

If you are writing about problems and solutions, think about:

- What needs to change? Why?
- What effect will or would this have?
- How do you know? How sure are you?

- 3) Think of umbrella or general terms that are used to refer to smaller, more personal ideas you have. For example:
Personal: 'I lost my job' → General: *There can be unemployment problems.*
- 4) Look back at the question to check you haven't missed anything out in your planning. Have a clear idea of your response, your position, your argument, and the main ideas within each paragraph *before* you start to write.

Writing strategies

- 1) Keep in mind that your careful planning will make this step easier. You still have plenty of time.
- 2) Follow your plan. Make changes as you write only if a better way to express an idea occurs to you.
- 3) Write in a natural way. Imagine you are writing to a colleague, and that it is very important that your colleague understands your opinion and follows your argument. You don't need to impress this colleague with any fancy vocabulary, you just need them to understand.
- 4) Be aware of the PEEL structure.

Checking strategies

- 1) Read the question again. Read through your whole answer. Did you answer the question? Is your position clear? Are any parts a little unclear still? Make the ideas as clear as you can – making them simpler is usually the best way to do this. (E.g. by dividing one long sentence into two shorter ones, or by making a passive sentence active.)
- 2) Read through again. Try to hear the words in your mind as you read. Look out for repetition, but don't worry too much if these are key words from the topic. Do make changes if you use the same words within one or two sentences. Find a synonym or use a pronoun to refer back, like these examples from my own writing practice:

Replacing a repeated word with a synonym:

Before:

- Thus, when a language is **lost**, its community and culture is also **lost**. This must be an enormous **loss** for the people concerned.

After:

- Thus, when a language is **lost**, part of the community and culture also **disappears**. This must be an enormous **loss** for the people concerned.

Cutting or removing words:

Before:

- In conclusion, while it is true that having fewer languages in **the world** benefits **the world** of business...

After:

- In conclusion, while it is true that having **fewer languages** benefits **the world** of business...

- 3) Don't add more (e.g. more vocabulary, more examples, more ideas). If your essay is too short, and you often need to try to add more, then review the key ideas about planning – this is a clear sign you are not planning enough, or possibly not connecting your ideas clearly enough, or not explaining them clearly enough.
- 4) Finally, with any extra time, look for slips or errors such as: verb / subject agreement (especially in the simple present); singular or plural nouns; missed prepositions; spelling mistakes that you often make.

19.2 Timed test practice advice

By now, you may feel confident enough in your planning to stop using the planner. If you would like to use the same approach in your timed test practice and in your test, this is a quick sketch version that has all of the key components of the planner:

<u>Intro</u> Focus: Topic: Issue: My pos:		Themes
A	B	
Topic:	Topic:	
Link?	Link?	
<u>Concl</u> Summary: Q: Final pos:		

Practise sketching it several times, and each time you plan, so that the moves are automatic to you. You can watch a video on my blog of me doing this if that helps.

General tips

- Make sure that you only do timed test practice when you know you will not be interrupted. Don't try to write when you are tired – you should be as well-rested as possible both for your practice and for the test.
- The more often you practise thinking and planning for up to 10 minutes, and writing for up to 20 minutes, the more confident you will be in your ability to do this in the test. Believing you can do it goes a very long way to helping you stay focused and disciplined in the test.
- If you run into a problem in an essay, stop, take a break, and start again. Later, try to think about what happened and why. Did you fall back on old habits? Was there a key thinking strategy that you forgot to use? Try to see this in a positive way – making mistakes like this during your practice helps you to anticipate possible problems and deal with them before your test.

- Try to notice which tasks cause you more problems so that you can do more practice in these areas. For example, if you find you struggle to write about a particular topic, make sure to do some general reading about it. You could do a Google search for the topic '+ news' to see what people think about this topic. If you struggle when it comes to expressing ideas, make sure to study vocabulary related to the topic.
- If at all possible, work with a test buddy. Even chatting about the writing process and the difficulties you have had will help. Discussing your ideas and explaining your argument will be even more beneficial.

19.3 Reviewing – a reminder of what to look for

Your introduction

- Did you begin with a general statement to introduce the topic or context of the essay? ✓
- Did you summarise the main issue to be discussed in your own words? ✓
- Did you include a brief thesis statement that summarises your overall position (if preferred)?
- Could you recreate the test question from your introduction? ✓

Body paragraphs

- Can you identify the point or argument being made? (is it clear?) ✓
- Are the ideas relevant to this essay question? ✓
- Are the conclusions (i.e. your main ideas or points) clear? ✓
- Are the conclusions repetitive? (i.e. do you repeat the same main ideas?) ✗
- Is there supporting evidence for your ideas? ✓
- Did you make your position clear? Is it clear throughout? ✓
- Is there one clear topic? ✓
- Is the link or relevance to the question clear? ✓

Your Conclusion

- Does your conclusion:
 - summarise the main ideas in your argument? ✓
 - answer the question? ✓
 - make your overall position clear? ✓
- Is your conclusion long enough (at least 2 sentences)? ✓
- Did you include extra themes or ideas that are not discussed or explained in your essay? ✗

To assess your score, think about the following (the more boxes you tick, the closer to band 7 your answer is.)

Task response

- Does the essay:
 - address all parts of the task? ☑
 - Present a clear position throughout? ☑
 - Present, extend, and support main ideas? (Does the writer explain why they believe this?) ☑
- Are the conclusions clear? ☑ (Is there anything confusing for the reader?) ☑

Coherence and cohesion

- Are the ideas organised logically? ☑
- Is there clear progression in the argument? ☑
- Are the cohesive devices used effectively? (i.e. as a helpful signpost for the reader) ☑
- Is there a range of cohesive devices? ☑
- Is there a clear central topic within each paragraph? ☑

Lexical resource

- Is the vocabulary helpful in explaining the writer's ideas clearly? ☑
- Does the writer mainly use vocabulary that they understand well? ☑
- Is the style of the language appropriately formal? ☑
- Does the writer use high-level vocabulary without an awareness of collocation and style? ☑

Grammatical range and accuracy

- Is there a variety of grammatical structures? ☑
- Or do the sentences follow a similar pattern and sound repetitive? ☑
- Are there only a few grammatical errors? ☑
- Are there many long sentences and complex grammar points used to try to show a high level)? ☑

Key idea: Remember, don't try to 'boost' your score with long complex sentences or high-level vocabulary. Write clearly and naturally.

Extra practice

- Review the key points made in lessons 3 to 9 as well as any of your worksheets from these lessons. Can you now improve any of your earlier answers?
- Review the model answers in this book. Try to vary the way that you use them and return to them again and again if possible – you will notice something new each time. Try not to look at the models for lesson 20 until after you have completed those essays.

The ideas below will help you exploit the models in this book:

Using model answers

Task response:

Focus on the argument and how I made my position clear. Notice the role that language (both vocabulary and grammar) play in that. For example, the use of modals, choice of vocabulary etc. Trace the main ideas in my argument. Find the supporting evidence or explanation for these ideas. Try to identify my conclusions and my claims, and notice when I need to explain these.

Coherence and cohesion:

Think about the organisation of ideas and the one central idea or topic in each paragraph. Notice the use of cohesive devices, including: referencing; the use of synonyms to refer back to a previous idea; the use of connecting words and phrases. Pay close attention to the PEEL structure. Notice that the final sentences in a paragraph have two clear functions: to conclude the paragraph, and to help make the relevance or link to the question clear.

Grammatical range:

Notice different points of grammar each time you read the model. For example: nouns and whether they have an article or not; verb tenses; prepositions; modals; relative clauses; the use of commas. Notice also the use of different sentence lengths.

Lexical resource:

Notice the use of synonyms throughout the essay. Many band 6.5 candidates try to showcase their knowledge of vocabulary related to the topic in the question, but the result is often unnatural and does not show 'an awareness of style' (band 7). In the models, you will see that it is much more natural to occasionally repeat key words.

Make a note of any words and phrases you would like to learn. To review and practise new language, read a sentence aloud, think about the meaning and the main idea in it, then try to write it using as many of the original words and phrases as you can recall.

Lesson 20 – Timed Test practice questions

Complete each essay under exam conditions. Use the **Think-Plan-Write-Check** approach and the timing recommended below. When you have finished an essay, put it away and return to it one or two days later to review it. Use the ideas in lesson 19.3 to help with this. Work with a test buddy if you can. If you don't feel satisfied with your response, wait a few days, then repeat the task.

For extra practice, write a new plan and a new answer to any of the questions where you feel you could make the opposite argument. Review the language in the model answers at the end of this lesson, and be sure to complete the exercises based on these.

Key idea: As your exam approaches, keep in mind that the examiner wants you to do well – they want to be able to give you the highest score that they can. Make their job easier by communicating your ideas as clearly as you can.

Recommended timing for each essay:

Steps	Recommended time
Think Think about the question, identify the topic, the issue and focus, possible themes, and your initial position	1-2 mins
Plan I. Brainstorm to get initial ideas (gather evidence) II. Think critically to connect and organise ideas into a clear balanced argument that supports your position	7-8 mins
Write Write out the essay from your plan	18 – 20 mins
Check I. Check your position and argument are clear throughout; check there is one clear topic in each paragraph – PEEL structure II. Check language - make language changes for clarity or to avoid repetition; correct errors	8 mins
III. Proofread – slips, typos and error spotting	2 mins

On the next few pages, you will find six new writing tasks to help you put the strategies you have learned into practice, model answers, and exercises based on these.

Key idea: In your test, stay focused and use all of the skills and strategies you have learned. They will help you to stay in control and answer in a disciplined and focused way.

I wish you all the very best of luck with your test!

20.1 Test Practice questions 1 and 2

Key idea: Complete each essay under exam conditions. Use the **Think-Plan-Write-Check** approach. When you have finished an essay, put it away and return to it one or two days later to review it. Use the ideas in lesson 19.3 to help. Work with a test buddy if you can. If you don't feel satisfied with your response, wait a few days, then repeat the task.

Read the model answers only when you are happy with your own response. Remember, there is no single 'correct' answer to any writing task. Your perspective, argument, and views will be different to mine.

Test question 1

You should spend 40 minutes on each task. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. Write at least 250 words.

Some young people like to copy the behaviour and clothes of famous people.

Why might this be the case?

What problems might it cause?

Test question 2

You should spend 40 minutes on each task. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. Write at least 250 words.

Some people believe that children of all ages should have extra responsibilities (for example, helping at home or at work). Others believe that, outside of school, children should be free to enjoy life.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

On the next page, you will find model answers for test questions 1 and 2, and a language focus task to help build your vocabulary.

Model answers for test questions 1 and 2

Key idea: Read the model answers only when you are happy with your own response. Remember, there is no single 'correct' answer to any writing task. Your perspective, argument, and views will be different to mine. Use the models to help improve your writing skills, improve your accuracy, and build your vocabulary.

Here is a reminder of the different ways you can use model answers:

Using model answers

Task response:

Focus on the argument and how I made my position clear. Notice the role that language (both vocabulary and grammar) play in that. For example, the use of modals, choice of vocabulary etc. Trace the main ideas in my argument. Find the supporting evidence or explanation for these ideas. Try to identify my conclusions and my claims, and notice when I need to explain these.

Coherence and cohesion:

Think about the organisation of ideas and the one central idea or topic in each paragraph. Notice the use of cohesive devices, including: referencing; the use of synonyms to refer back to a previous idea; the use of connecting words and phrases. Pay close attention to the PEEL structure. Notice that the final sentences in a paragraph have two clear functions: to conclude the paragraph, and to help make the relevance or link to the question clear.

Grammatical range:

Notice different points of grammar each time you read the model. For example: nouns and whether they have an article or not; verb tenses; prepositions; modals; relative clauses; the use of commas. Notice also the use of different sentence lengths.

Lexical resource:

Notice the use of synonyms throughout the essay. Many band 6.5 candidates try to showcase their knowledge of vocabulary related to the topic in the question, but the result is often unnatural and does not show 'an awareness of style' (band 7). In the models, you will see that it is much more natural to occasionally repeat key words.

Make a note of any words and phrases you would like to learn. To review and practise new language, read a sentence aloud, think about the meaning and the main idea in it, then try to write it using as many of the original words and phrases as you can recall.

Test 1 Model answer

Each generation has its own stars and fashion icons. The young often look up to these people and like to copy their style. This essay will consider the reasons for this and the problems it may cause.

There are several reasons why young people aspire to be like the popular stars of their day. Firstly, this tends to happen when children are developing into young adults, and becoming more aware of their identity. Some have an innate sense of their own style but it takes most young people years to develop this same confidence. Until then, the need to fit in is very strong, and so it is not surprising that they should copy the stars that they, and all of their friends, look up to. It is also possible that teenagers want to be different to their parents. Therefore, copying the famous may be a way for young people to conform as well as to rebel.

Nevertheless, this phenomenon can create problems. The famous like to stand out, and their fashion choices can be unorthodox. Attempting to copy this could cause conflict in the home, especially if the young people concerned come from a very conservative background. In addition, the famous now tend to be very active on social media and many document their daily life and activities. If these celebrities make poor choices, this may mean that young people are encouraged to copy unhealthy behaviour, such as smoking, or following an extreme diet. Thus, the celebrities in question may not be the best of role models.

In conclusion, wanting to be like their heroes is a normal part of development, and may help teens establish their own identity. Although it can sometimes cause conflict, thankfully it is something that they eventually grow out of. (296)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below.

1. who a person is, the qualities that make them different
2. natural; a talent or quality you were born with
3. a desire to be like everyone else in a group
4. to admire
5. to behave in an acceptable way - the same as everyone else
6. to act in a way that does not follow the accepted rules
7. to be noticeable; to be different to everyone else
8. different to what is expected
9. to create problems
10. to make bad decisions

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Test 2 Model answer

Children are constantly learning and developing. Some people believe this should include learning how to work and be responsible, while others disagree. There are pros and cons to both views.

Some children have no responsibilities within the home when their school day is over. These children learn how to relax from an early age. As a result, they are more likely to develop into adults who are also very relaxed about life. However, although this may seem ideal, it is also possible that, as children, they will become bored and lack self-discipline. Although some might enjoy spending time outside with their friends, how many would simply sit watching TV, or playing computer games? Consequently, as adults, they may be unmotivated or even irresponsible. This level of freedom would certainly affect a child's development.

In contrast, children who are given responsibility from an early age would develop in a very different way. Even young children can be given simple daily chores. In this way, they learn to be responsible for themselves and not expect others to do things for them. Those who help their parents at work, for example in a family restaurant or shop, would also surely learn a great deal about life. Nevertheless, this idea can be taken too far. Children who are forced to work from a very young age can miss out on education because of this, and experience many of the stresses of adult life. Therefore, sensible limits on this type of work are needed.

In my view, there are benefits to both approaches. It is important for all children to know how to relax and enjoy life, but also to balance this by being responsible when necessary. In this way, they are more likely to grow into well-rounded adults with a healthy work-life balance. (299)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below.

1. inside
2. perfect
3. to be without (something)
4. the ability to control your own behaviour
5. having no desire to do something
6. not thinking or worrying about the results of effects of something
7. small jobs at home
8. using good judgment
9. having varied life experiences
10. an equal amount of time relaxing and working

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

20.2 Test questions 3 and 4

Test question 3

You should spend 40 minutes on each task. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. Write at least 250 words.

Nowadays, sports stars can earn a great deal of money from advertising expensive sporting goods and other products.

What problems might this cause?

Do you think this is a positive or a negative development?

Test question 4

You should spend 40 minutes on each task. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. Write at least 250 words.

Working long hours causes a great deal of stress and can be very bad for the health. The government must find a way to reduce this type of stress.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

On the next page, you will find model answers for test questions 3 and 4, and a language focus task to help build your vocabulary.

Key idea: Read the model answers only when you are happy with your own response. Remember, there is no single 'correct' answer to any writing task. Your perspective, argument, and views will be different to mine. Use the models to help improve your writing skills, improve your accuracy, and build your vocabulary.

Model answers for test questions 3 and 4

Test 3 Model answer

Sports and advertising are now very closely linked. Thus, when we think of famous sports stars, we often inevitably think of the brand of clothing they wear. This can cause problems but also has a positive effect.

Once they reach a certain level, sports stars or teams are offered generous sponsorship deals. This means that they receive large sums of money in return for advertising different companies. They are given these contracts because of their fans, many of whom are very young and want to copy them. As the products they endorse tend to be luxury goods, or expensive sports equipment, this puts pressure on families to spend money they may not have. Moreover, the most popular sports are now associated with advertisements for betting and gambling, and many people are concerned about the impact this has on young sports fans. Thus, the problems connected to such advertising should not be overlooked.

On the other hand, there are several positive effects. Firstly, without advertising, it is unlikely that we would have the level of sport that exists today. Sponsorships allow modern-day sportsmen and women to focus on their sport instead of juggling practice with a more traditional job. This in turn encourages more young people to play sport, and gives those who are talented enough a chance to turn their passion into a lucrative career. In fact, there have been several cases in football where children from very poor areas have transformed their lives thanks to sport. Therefore, there are clear benefits for sport and sports professionals.

In conclusion, advertising sponsorships allow sports people and sport itself to thrive. Although the type of products that can be advertised do need regulation, on the whole, I believe this is a positive development. (291)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below.

1. the mark or name of a company
2. money given by a company to support someone
3. to give your support to; promote
4. to fail to notice (a problem)
5. managing several different elements at once
6. something that can bring in a lot of money
7. to change something completely (for the better)
8. to grow and develop in a very successful way
9. official rules and controls

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Test 4 Model answer

Stress from overwork is a key factor in public health. Some believe the government should do something about this. This essay will discuss whether this type of intervention is necessary.

Longer working hours and higher levels of stress are caused by a combination of factors. Firstly, there is now greater competition for jobs, which means that employers can pressure workers to achieve more within their working week. Often, this can only be done by working longer days; if workers refuse, they can easily be replaced. Secondly, developments in mobile technology have created an expectation that problems will be dealt with immediately. For these reasons, the office now extends into the home, and old ideas, such as working '9 to 5', no longer exist in many jobs. Consequently, more and more workers now report feeling exhausted. Clearly, employees are not receiving the support they need.

While working conditions have changed enormously, in many countries, employment regulations have not. Some people may argue that the government can do little to help. However, several countries have already managed to address these problems. In one instance, the working week was officially reduced to 4 days. This was initially done as an experiment to gauge the impact on businesses and workers, but the result was a success. The workers were not only more relaxed but also more productive, and still able to meet their targets. However, it seems unlikely that businesses would make changes like this unless they were forced to do so. This shows that governments do have an important role to play in the way employees are treated.

In conclusion, much of the stress now felt by workers comes from the faster pace of life and work, and companies should help employees deal with this. I completely agree that governments should act on behalf of workers to force this change. (307)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below (NB they are in the same order as the text)

1. becoming involved
2. there are now more people trying to get or do the same thing
3. to strongly persuade someone to do something they don't want to do
4. to say you will not do something
5. the belief that something will happen
6. to take care of (a problem)
7. to increase the range of something
8. extremely tired
9. to assess or calculate
10. able to produce a lot
11. to achieve your goals
12. (doing something) for or in the place of (someone else)

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

20.3 Test Practice questions 5 and 6

Test question 5

You should spend 40 minutes on each task. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. Write at least 250 words.

Some experts believe it is better for animals to live in zoos where they are safe and are given all the food they need.

Do you think that living in zoos has more advantages or more disadvantages for animals?

Test question 6

You should spend 40 minutes on each task. Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. Write at least 250 words.

In some countries, more and more local shops are closing down because so many people now shop online.

What problems might this cause?

What is the best way to deal with this problem?

On the next page, you will find model answers for test questions 5 and 6, and a language focus task to help build your vocabulary.

Key idea: Read the model answers only when you are happy with your own response. Remember, there is no single 'correct' answer to any writing task. Your perspective, argument, and views will be different to mine. Use the models to help improve your writing skills, improve your accuracy, and build your vocabulary.

Model answers for test questions 5 and 6

Test 5 Model answer

Large zoos can be found in most parts of the world. Many, though not all, are established to take care of animals. This can have both advantages and disadvantages for the animals concerned.

Zoos can have clear benefits for animals. Firstly, they are given food, shelter, and protection. The need for these is growing due to urban development, which reduces the habitat of many species. Many are also killed on new roads that are built across their normal hunting grounds. In addition, protection is needed from poachers, who can make large sums of money from the sale of furs or tusks. Through their conservation programmes, zoos offer protection for endangered species, who are often those most at risk from all of these issues. Therefore, places like this represent a crucial lifeline for many animals.

Nevertheless, there are also disadvantages. Although the best animal parks try to replicate the natural habitat of each species, they cannot achieve this for larger creatures, or those adapted to life in a different climate. Captive animals that were born in the wild must surely feel this loss. The situation is far worse in smaller facilities, without the funds to offer more than a bare cage. In addition, running a zoo requires a great deal of money, which is obtained through attracting visitors. Thus, the animals are put on display or forced to perform for the public. Furthermore, while animals in the wild spend their time looking for food or engaging in natural behaviour, in zoos they have very little meaningful activity in their day. Consequently, they often display signs of boredom and stress. Thus, for many creatures, life within a zoo is not a happy one.

In conclusion, zoos clearly offer much-needed protection from human threats. However, the disadvantages of living in captivity for species that are not endangered must surely be greater. (308)

Language focus

NB Notice that I did not always use a synonym for the words zoo or animal. Which synonyms did I use for these words?

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below.

1. the growth of a city
2. the natural areas where animals live
3. people who illegally hunt and kill animals
4. in danger
5. types of animals that may die out or disappear
6. very important form of help (a way of saving someone)
7. to copy or doing something again in the same way
8. unable to move freely; not free
9. to show
10. synonyms for animals:
11. synonyms for zoos:

[Click here to see the answers.](#)

Test 6 Model answer

Small shops provide an important service to the local community. However, online shopping is forcing many to close. This causes problems that need to be addressed.

The issues surrounding online shopping are complex. In the past, when people needed to buy something, they would wait to visit a shop and buy several things at once. Nowadays, we can have whatever we want brought to our door within a day. Smaller shops feel the effects of this the most, because people will often visit their store but then go online to buy a cheaper alternative. However, the community also suffers. In some places, local high streets now have few interesting shops and many 'closed' signs. As a result, the elderly, and anyone without easy access to a computer, are forced to travel further to buy what they need. Even more importantly, door-to-door deliveries require extra packaging and road traffic, which have a damaging effect on the environment. Thus, the impact of shopping online is felt by more than local shop owners.

Nevertheless, there are several possible solutions. Firstly, the smaller shops could adapt and offer an online service to their customers. They can also show that they offer better quality products than the internet can. However, it should not only be the smaller businesses that change. We also need to force the online giants to pay taxes similar to those that physical stores must pay. In addition, the public need take more responsibility and adopt a more community minded and environmentally aware approach to their shopping. Therefore, these issues can only be resolved with everyone's cooperation.

In conclusion, evolution has shown the benefits of adapting to change, and this is the best way for local shops to survive. Nevertheless, shoppers also need to stop searching online for cheaper, easier options.
(299)

Language focus

Find a word or phrase in the model answer that means the same as the words below.

1. option
2. the part of a city or town where the key local shops are
3. the old people
4. to have a quick and simple way of getting to something
5. deliveries from the business direct to your home
6. to change something slightly (often to suit a situation or purpose)
7. a shop found on a street (not online)
8. thinking about or considering the environment
9. working together to achieve something

[Click here to see the answers.](#)