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The 6.5 → 7.0 Sprint: A 30-Day Correction Plan

Thirty days, one job each: find what holds your 6.5, drill it about an hour a day, test it twice in a row, and decide on Day 30 whether to book.

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The 6.5 → 7.0 Sprint: A 30-Day Correction Plan

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What this book is

You have a 6.5, you need 7.0, and you want to start now. This book gives you thirty days, and one job for each day.

The plan is simple to describe. In the first week you find what is holding your band and put a number on it. For the next three weeks you practise against that one thing for about an hour a day, and you test it on fixed days, on material you have never seen. On Day 30 you look at what the tests say and decide: book the test, run the plan again, or go back and look for the real problem.

Most of the rules in this plan are not new. They come from other books on this site, and each one is named where it is used. What this book adds is the calendar: which job falls on which day, and why it falls there.

What this book is not

It does not repeat *Stuck at 6.5? The Half-Band Wall and How to Break It*. That book shows how far your 6.5 is from 7.0, how to tell a real wall from the ordinary ups and downs of a score, and how to choose between a re-mark, a One Skill Retake and a full resit. This plan uses all of that, and sends you back there for the detail.

It does not repeat *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0* either. That book tells you when a skill is done and when you are ready to book. Its rules decide your Day 30.

It is not a skill course. The practice for each skill comes from that skill's book on this site: *Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook*, *Reading 7.0: The 30/40 Question-Type Priority Map*, *Speaking 7.0: What "Fluent Enough" Actually Sounds Like* and, for Writing, *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing — and the 3 Fixes That Move You to 7.0*. This book tells you when to do each piece, not how.

The one promise this book makes

By Day 30 you will know, from tests you can show someone, whether your half band has moved, and what to do next. This book does not promise 7.0 in thirty days. Thirty days is the length of the plan, not a claim about how long your problem takes to fix. Nobody can know that before you start, and only an official result tells you where you stand.

One thing to know before you start

The four candidates in this book are the four from *Stuck at 6.5?*: Mai, Arjun, Sofia and Karim. They, their scores and their thirty days were invented. The test facts come from ielts.org. The hours in the plan are this book's own working figures, not numbers from research, and each one is named as such where it is used.

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Part 1 — Before Day 1



1.1 What thirty days can and cannot do

Thirty days can do three things. They can show you what is holding your band, with a number on it. They can give that one thing fourteen days of practice that is aimed at it and nothing else. And they can test it twice in a row, on material you have not seen, so that on Day 30 you have evidence and not a feeling.

Thirty days cannot promise that the thing will move. Some walls move in a week. Some take longer than a month. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 5.6, refuses to give a number of weeks, and this book keeps that line. What the plan does promise is that on Day 30 you will know which kind you have.

There is one mistake this plan is built to stop: turning thirty days into thirty practice tests. It is the usual way to spend a month before a resit. It measures the same 6.5 again and again and changes nothing, as *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 3.1, explains. In this plan you sit two full tests, one at each

end of the month. Everything in between is practice on one thing, with a short test of that thing every week.

1.2 The thirty days

Days 1 to 14 find your wall, give it six drill days and end with the first checkpoint. Days 15 to 30 drill it for eight more days, check it twice more and decide.

Days	What happens
1	Your requirement, word for word, and your steps
2	Checkpoint 0: a full test, as on the real day
3	Take the test apart, skill by skill
4	Find the pattern; write the wall in one sentence, with a count
5	Plan your hours; book your marker's dates
6	First drill day
7	Rest
8–12	Drill days
13	Rest
14	Checkpoint 1: the wall skill, on new material

Days	What happens
15	Read the checkpoint; hold or adjust
16–19	Drill days
20	Rest
21	Checkpoint 2: the wall skill, on new material
22	Read the checkpoint
23–26	Drill days, at test speed
27	Rest
28	Checkpoint 3: a full test again, as on Day 2
29	Take the test apart
30	Decide

Parts 2 to 5 take these days in order. Part 7 has the same plan on one page, with space to fill in.

1.3 What you need

New practice material, counted. Every checkpoint needs material you have not seen before, or the result tells you about your memory, not your English. Count what you have before you start:

- **two full tests** you have not seen, for Days 2 and 28;

- **two more in your wall skill**, for Days 14 and 21. If your wall is Writing, that is two more Writing tests (both tasks). If it is Speaking, two more topic cards and their questions.

Use official practice material where you can. For drill days you can use material you have already seen. Most drills work on your own past answers.

A marker, if your wall is Writing or Speaking. You cannot mark your own Writing or Speaking the way an examiner would. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 3.2, explains why. Find a teacher who marks from the public band descriptors and can give you a mark for each criterion, not just one band. You will need them on Days 2, 14, 21 and 28, with the marks back by the next day.

A recorder. A phone is enough. You need it for Speaking on Days 2 and 28 whatever your wall is.

An hour a day, at the same time. Section 1.4 explains the hour.

1.4 About an hour a day

The plan is built on about an hour a day, on fourteen drill days. That figure is this book's working number, not a number from research. It is small enough to keep for a month next to work or study, and large enough for one drill, a little upkeep and a count.

If you have more time, do not add more practice tests. Add it to the drill, or keep it for rest. If you have less, keep the drill and the count, and cut the upkeep first. Part 3 shows how the hour splits.

1.5 Two things to check first

Is your test already booked? If it is less than thirty days away, the calendar does not fit. You can move the test, if your centre allows it (check its rules and any fee). Or you can keep the date and do Days 1 to 5 anyway, so you know what you are walking in with. Do not squeeze the checkpoints closer together. Two checkpoints three days apart cannot show that anything has held.

Does one score look wrong? If one score is out of line with all your other evidence, a re-mark may fit better than a month of work. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 6.1, explains when. A re-mark looks at your old answers, not at anything you do this month, and there is a time limit for asking. So if a re-mark fits, ask before Day 1.

Part 2 — Week 1: find the wall

The first week has no practice in it until Day 6. That can feel like a waste of a week. It is the opposite. A month of practice on the wrong thing is the bigger waste, and Week 1 is how you avoid it.

2.1 Day 1: your requirement and your steps

Write down what your university, employer or visa office asks for, word for word. "7.0" is not enough. Is it 7.0 overall? 7.0 overall with no skill below 6.5? 7.0 in each skill? *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 1.4, shows how much this changes.

Then count your steps from your last official result. Add your four scores. 7.0 overall needs a total of 27, and each half band in one skill is one step (*Stuck at 6.5?*, section 1.2). Write down how many steps you need, and which skills they are allowed to come from.

If a One Skill Retake might suit you later, check one more thing today: the date of your last test. A retake has to be taken within 60 days of it (*Stuck at 6.5?*, section 6.2). Day 30 is a month away, so work out whether the window will still be open.

2.2 Day 2: Checkpoint 0

Sit a full practice test you have not seen before, as close to the real day as you can make it. ielts.org describes the real day like this: "You will do the Listening, Reading, and Writing sections in one test session. This takes 2 hours 40 minutes, and there are no breaks between each section of the test." So do the same:

- Listening, Reading and Writing in that order, in one sitting, with no breaks;
- in the way you will sit the real test. On computer, that means typing your Writing, with no spell checker;
- Speaking recorded the same day if you can, with a topic card you have not seen. It takes 11 to 14 minutes.

Score Listening and Reading with the table that comes with the test. Send your Writing and your Speaking recording to your marker. Write the scores down and leave them for today.

This test is your starting line. Everything on Day 28 is measured against it.

2.3 Day 3: take it apart

A score tells you where you are. It does not tell you why (*Stuck at 6.5?*, section 3.3). Today you look underneath it, skill by skill, with the method from *Stuck at 6.5?*, Part 4:

- **Listening.** Sort every wrong answer into four piles: did not hear it; heard it but wrote it wrong; lost my place; took the first answer (section 4.1).
- **Reading.** Sort your wrong and blank answers by question type, then again by passage (4.2).
- **Writing.** Make the three counts from *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, section 3.2: parts answered, steps per idea, and error-free sentences, long and short. When the marks come back, see which criteria are at 6.

- **Speaking.** Write out thirty seconds from the middle of your recording and check each pause, as *Speaking 7.0*, Part 6, shows.

Do not stop at Day 2's test. Put your older evidence next to it: your official results, any essays a teacher has marked, any practice tests you scored. One test is one day. A pattern needs more.

2.4 Day 4: the pattern and the sentence

Put Day 2 next to your official results and find your pattern. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 2.3, has four: the same skill low every time (a wall), a different skill low each time (a wobble), everything level (a flat wall), or two strong skills hiding two weak ones.

Then write your wall in one sentence, with a count in it (*Stuck at 6.5?*, section 5.1). Here is Mai's:

"In all three of my marked essays, I wrote about only one of the two questions in the Task 2 prompt, and I made about six article mistakes in every two hundred words."

The count is the most important part of the sentence. It is what every checkpoint will measure. "My Writing is weak" has no count, so nothing can show that it has changed.

If nothing repeats across your tests, do not invent a wall. You may have a wobble, and section 3.5 shows what a wobble does with the month.

2.5 Day 5: the hours and the dates

Choose your hour. Pick the same time each day if you can, and write the fourteen drill days into your calendar. If you miss one, do not do two hours the next day. Move the missed hour to the next rest day instead.

Then fix the dates with your marker for Days 14, 21 and 28, with marks back the next day. Do it now. A checkpoint with no mark is only half a checkpoint, and teachers' weeks fill up.

Last, count your new material again (1.3). If you are one test short, find it now, not on Day 20.

2.6 Day 6: the first drill

Your first hour of practice on the wall. Part 3 shows what goes into it. Keep it to the one thing your sentence names, and end it with the count and a one-line note.

2.7 Day 7: rest

Do nothing on the test today. A rest day is part of the plan, not a reward for good work. There is one each week, and it is also where a missed drill hour goes.

Part 3 — A drill day



Fourteen of the thirty days are drill days. They all have the same shape, and this part shows it. It does not teach the drills. Each one belongs to a skill book on this site, and each line below sends you to it.

3.1 The hour

Minutes	What you do
0–35	The drill. The one thing your sentence names, and nothing else.
35–50	Upkeep. One cleared skill, a different one each day.
50–60	The count and the note.

The split is this book's working figure, not a rule. What matters is the order of importance. The drill comes first and is never cut. The count comes second, because without it the drill teaches you nothing about

whether it works. Upkeep comes last, and on a short day it is the part to drop.

3.2 The drill, skill by skill

Stuck at 6.5?, section 5.2, draws the line this hour runs on: practise the wall, and use full tests only to measure it. So the drill is never a full test. It is a short piece of work aimed at your count.

Listening. Work on your biggest pile from Day 3.

- *Heard it, wrote it wrong*: spelling, plurals, numbers and word limits, from *Listening 7.0*, Part 5. Its section 5.1 says the fix for these is spelling practice, not more listening. Replay sections you have done before, and check every answer letter by letter.
- *Lost my place*: the two-second drill in Part 6 of the same book, rehearsed until you do it without thinking.
- *Took the first answer*: section 1.2 of the same book, on the speaker who changes the answer.
- *Did not hear it*: Parts 3 and 4 of the same book, on reading ahead and on each question type.

Reading. If one question type is your pile, work on sets of that type from official material, with its section in *Reading 7.0*, Part 4, open beside you. Add a few sentences of the paraphrase drill in section 5.2. If your pile is the third passage, the problem is time, and Part 6 of the same book covers it.

Writing. One fix at a time, as *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, section 7.1, says. Start with Fix 1 if it is one of yours.

- *Fix 1*: plan Task 2 prompts and Task 1 tasks, and write the count at the top of each: parts asked, parts answered (section 4.4).
- *Fix 2*: the rewrite drill, fifteen minutes a paragraph, on paragraphs you have already written (section 5.6).
- *Fix 3*: take your long sentences that have errors, find which of your three each one is, and write it again correctly (sections 6.2 to 6.5).

Speaking. Speak aloud through Part 1, 2 and 3 questions, with one rule from *Speaking 7.0*, section 3.1: finish the sentence you started, even with a plainer word. Record once a week, not every day. Write out thirty seconds of that recording and check it as Part 6 of the same book shows. Its section 6.3 explains why one a week: the aim is to learn to hear the line, not to make yourself nervous every time you speak.

3.3 Upkeep for the cleared skills

A cleared skill is one that is already where your requirement needs it. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 5.3, says leave it alone, because more practice on it will not raise your score. Leave it alone, but do not leave it out. Skills slip without any practice at all, as *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, section 4.3, warns.

So upkeep is small. One Listening section, one Reading passage, one Task 1, or five minutes of Speaking Part 1 aloud. No score and no count. Just enough to keep the skill warm.

This is less than *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0* uses in its example in section 4.2, which keeps each cleared skill at about an hour a week. That is a choice for one month, not a new rule. The full test on Day 28 checks that nothing has slipped. It falls 26 days after the one on Day 2, inside the

three to four weeks that section 4.3 asks for. If a cleared skill drops on Day 28, it is not cleared any more.

3.4 The count and the note

End each drill day with two things.

The count. Take the count from your sentence, on today's work. If your sentence counts article mistakes in two hundred words, count them in what you wrote today.

The note. One line on which failure showed up today. *The Band 7.0 Blueprint*, section 7.2, asks for the same line after every session. "Two plurals wrong in Section 3, both after *several*" is a note. "I need to get better at Listening" is not, because it does not tell you what to do tomorrow.

A drill-day count is only a sign. The counts that decide anything are the ones taken at checkpoints, on new material, under time (Part 4).

3.5 Two walls, or a wobble

Two walls in two skills. Some candidates need two steps from two different skills. Arjun is one. His sentence names Listening and Speaking. He can work on both in the same month, because each has its own count. If one moves and the other does not, he can still tell which is which. He splits the drill: about twenty minutes of Listening and fifteen of Speaking.

Two problems in one skill are different. Take them one at a time, as *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, section 7.1, says, or you cannot tell which change worked (*Stuck at 6.5?*, section 3.5).

A wobble. If a different skill was low on each of your results, your problem is the day, not a skill. Sofia is the example. Her drill is the day itself: sections under their exact time, Writing to the sixty-minute plan in *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, section 7.5, and the checks for time in *The Band 7.0 Blueprint*, sections 6.1 and 6.2. Her count is how many minutes she is short, or has spare, at the end of Writing.

Her checkpoints on Days 14 and 21 are full tests, like Days 2 and 28. That makes four full tests in thirty days, which may look like the mistake from 1.1. It is not, because for a wobble the full sitting is the thing being tested, and she takes each one apart afterwards.

Part 4 — Weeks 2 to 4: drill and check

4.1 The weekly rhythm

From Day 8 to Day 28 the weeks look alike:

- **four or five drill days** (Part 3);
- **a rest day** (Days 13, 20 and 27);
- **a checkpoint** (Days 14, 21 and 28);
- **a reading day** after each of the first two checkpoints (Days 15 and 22).

The rest day comes before the checkpoint on purpose. A checkpoint taken tired measures how tired you are.

4.2 A checkpoint, done properly

A checkpoint is a test of your wall skill on material you have not seen before. On Days 14 and 21 it is that skill alone. On Day 28 it is a full test again, as on Day 2. Four rules make it worth having:

1. **New material.** Not a test you have drilled on, and not one you have read about.
2. **Real time.** The section's real time limit, with no pausing and no second listen. Writing is both tasks in sixty minutes. Speaking is all three parts, recorded.
3. **The real way.** If you will sit on computer, type the Writing, with no spell checker. *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, Part 2, sets out the conditions for each skill.

4. **Taken apart the same way as Day 3.** Same piles, same counts. If you change the way you count, you cannot compare the numbers.

Then write two things on your sheet (Part 7): **the count**, and **the score or the mark**. For Listening and Reading the score comes from the answer key. For Writing and Speaking it comes from your marker, criterion by criterion. A band you give yourself does not go on the sheet.

4.3 Reading a checkpoint

Days 15 and 22 are for reading what the checkpoint says. There are three possible answers.

What the checkpoint shows	What it usually means	What to do
The count moved, and so did the score or mark	The drill is aimed at the right thing	Change nothing
The count moved, but the score or mark did not	The drill works, but it may not be the missing piece	Day 15: hold for a week. Day 22: back to Day 3
The count did not move	Too early to say on Day 15; enough to say on Day 22	Day 15: check the drill matched your sentence. Day 22: back to Day 3

Day 15 is early. By Checkpoint 1 you have had six drill days. That is not long, and one result is one result. So on Day 15 the usual answer is to hold. Change something only if you find that your drill was not aimed at

your sentence. For example, you were drilling Reading in general when your sentence named True/False/Not Given.

Day 22 is not early. By Checkpoint 2 your first drill day is fifteen days behind you. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 5.6, puts the line at two weeks: if your count has not moved after two weeks of focused work, the problem is probably not the hours. Do not spend Week 4 on more of the same. Go straight to Part 5, section 5.5.

When the count moves and the mark does not. This one needs care. If your sentence names two things in one skill, the mark may not move until both are in place. When the first count holds, move on to the second, as *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, section 7.1, does. If your sentence names one thing, the count says the fix is in place and the mark says it is not the feature the examiner was missing. Section 7.3 of the same book says what to do: read the marker's comments again, and look for what you have not yet counted.

4.4 Week 4: at test speed

From Day 23 to Day 26 the drill stays the same, but the clock gets stricter. Do the drill inside the time the real test gives you:

- **Listening:** whole sections, played once, typed if you will sit on computer.
- **Reading:** whole passages, at about twenty minutes each (*Reading 7.0*, section 6.1).
- **Writing:** timed tasks, with your fix in its place in the sixty minutes (*Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, section 7.5).

- **Speaking:** answers spoken straight away, with no time to prepare except the minute Part 2 gives you.

A fix that works slowly is not finished. It has to work at the speed of the test, or it will not be there on the day.

4.5 Day 28: the second full test

Day 28 repeats Day 2: a full test you have not seen, Listening, Reading and Writing in one sitting with no breaks, and Speaking recorded. It does two jobs at once. It is **Checkpoint 3** for your wall skill, and it is the check on your cleared skills (3.3).

Send the Writing and Speaking to your marker. Score the rest. Then stop for the day. Day 29 is for taking it apart.

4.6 What not to change

During the three weeks, keep these fixed:

- **the wall.** You chose it on Day 4. Do not swap it for a new one because a drill felt hard;
- **the count.** Same thing counted, same way, every time;
- **the marker.** A new marker marks differently, and you will not know if the change was you;
- **the timetable.** Do not add a new course, a new book or a new teacher in the middle.

Stuck at 6.5?, section 3.5, explains why: change everything at once, and nobody can tell what worked. If you find a new problem on the way, write it down. It goes on the list for after Day 30.

Part 5 — Days 29 and 30: decide



5.1 Day 29: take it apart

Take Day 28's test apart exactly as you took Day 2's apart on Day 3: the same piles, the same counts. Then put the two side by side on your sheet.

Look at two things. First, your wall: what did Checkpoints 2 and 3 say? Second, your cleared skills: did any of them drop between Day 2 and Day 28? If one did, it is not cleared any more, and it goes into your next plan as a gap of its own (*The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, section 4.3).

5.2 Day 30: the stopping rule

The rule that decides Day 30 is not new. It comes from *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, Part 2: a skill is done when it reaches your target on **two attempts in a row, on two different practice tests**. If one attempt hits and the next one misses, neither counts.

In this plan the two attempts are Checkpoints 2 and 3, on Days 21 and 28. That is why they fall where they do. They are a week apart, on

different material, and the second one is inside a full test, where the skill has to hold up in the third hour.

For Writing and Speaking, the rule asks one more thing: your counts have stopped improving. While a count is still falling, the skill is still moving, and it is too soon to call it done.

One result on target is not enough. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 2.1, shows how much a score can move on its own, with no change in your English. Two in a row is much harder to explain that way.

Day 30 has three possible answers.

5.3 Ready: choose your test

Checkpoints 2 and 3 both on target. Your wall skill has met the stopping rule. Before you book, go through the checklist in *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, section 3.1. If you sat Days 2 and 28 as Part 2 describes, they already answer some of its six items.

Then answer the question from *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 3.4: can you name, in one sentence, what is different since your last result? On Day 30 you can, because you have the count from Day 2 and the count from Day 28.

Now choose the test. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 6.4, has the table. After a sprint, the choice comes down to two:

- **a One Skill Retake**, if your steps all come from the skill you fixed, your last test was on computer, the 60 days since it have not run out, and your organisation accepts a retake result;
- **a full resit**, if not.

A re-mark is not on this list. It looks at your old answers, not at the work you did this month (1.5).

5.4 Moved, but not there: a second sprint

The count moved, but the checkpoints are not two on target.

Perhaps Checkpoint 3 hit and Checkpoint 2 did not. Perhaps both rose but stopped short. The drill is working. It has not finished working.

Do not book. Run the plan again, but not from Day 1. You already know your requirement and your wall. Use Day 28's test as your new Day 2, Day 29 as your new Day 3, and Day 30 as your new Day 4: write your sentence again, with today's count in it. Then carry on from Day 5.

Check one date before you start: if a retake is in your plans, will the 60 days still be open at the end of the second sprint?

5.5 Not moved: back to Day 3

The count did not move. After two weeks of focused work, *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 5.6, says the problem is probably not the hours. You may be working on the wrong thing.

Go back to Day 3, with Day 2 and Day 28 side by side. Take them apart again, and this time use other eyes if you can: a teacher, or a count you have not tried yet. You found the first wall with the same eyes that made the mistakes, and *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 3.2, explains why that can miss the real one. Write a new sentence, then start again from Day 4.

If you got here on Day 22 (4.3), you have saved a week.

5.6 When a mark is late

If your marker has not sent back Day 28's marks, Day 30 waits for them. Do not decide on half your evidence. A decision made a few days late costs less than a test booked on a guess (*The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, section 3.2, counts that cost).

Part 6 — Four sprints

Here are the four candidates from *Stuck at 6.5?*, each through the same thirty days. Their scores and wall sentences are the ones from that book. Their thirty days were invented for this one. They end in four different places, which is the point: Day 30 is a decision, not a prize.

6.1 Mai: one step, one skill, two fixes

Day 1. Mai's requirement says "7.0 overall, with no skill below 6.5". Her last result was Listening 7.5, Reading 6.5, Writing 6.0 and Speaking 6.5, a total of 26.5. One step, and because Writing is under the floor, it has to come from Writing.

Day 4. Her sentence names two things: one of the two questions in Task 2 left out, and about six article mistakes in two hundred words. In *Why You Keep Getting 6.5 in Writing*, those are Fix 1 and Fix 3. She starts with Fix 1, because it is the quickest.

Days 6 to 21. By Checkpoint 1 her count reads "2 asked, 2 answered", but her mark is still 6.0. Her sentence named two things, so on Day 15 she moves on to Fix 3 (4.3). At Checkpoint 2 she makes about three article mistakes in two hundred words, and the mark is 6.5.

Day 28. Writing is marked 6.5 again, on a different prompt, and the article count has stayed at about three. Her other skills held. The stopping rule is met.

Day 30. One step, from the skill she fixed: the table in *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 6.4, points to a One Skill Retake. But her university does not accept a retake result, so she books a full resit. In a full resit all four

scores can move a little, up or down. Her Day 28 test is her best evidence that the other three hold.

6.2 Arjun: two walls, and a mark that would not move

Day 1. Arjun needs "7.0 overall" and has 6.5 or close to it in everything. He sets two targets: Listening 7.0 and Speaking 7.0, with Reading and Writing held at 6.5. That adds up to 27.

Day 4. His sentence names both walls: answers lost to spelling and plurals, and sentences dropped before he finishes them. He splits each drill between the two (3.5).

Days 6 to 21. Listening goes well. He loses three answers to spelling on Day 2, one at each checkpoint after that, and scores 7.0 at Checkpoints 1 and 2. Speaking is harder to read. His dropped sentences fall from one in four to one in ten, but his teacher marks him 6.5 both times.

Day 22. The count moved and the mark did not, after two weeks (4.3). So for Speaking he goes back to Day 3. His teacher's comments point to something he had not counted: long turns that say the same thing twice (*Speaking 7.0*, section 3.3). He writes a new sentence, with that count in it.

Day 30. Listening has met the stopping rule. Speaking is still 6.5, but the new count is falling. That is "moved, but not there" (5.4). Listening goes into upkeep, and he starts a second sprint for Speaking alone. When Speaking is ready, he will look at the table again. His last official Speaking score was 6.0, so a Speaking retake would need a full band, which *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 6.2, calls a big move to plan on.

6.3 Sofia: the day, not a skill

Day 1. Sofia needs "7.0 overall". Her last result was Listening 7.0, Reading 6.5, Writing 6.0 and Speaking 7.0, a total of 26.5. Her pattern is a wobble. She checks the date: her last test was 18 days ago, so the 60-day window for a retake will still be open on Day 30, with less than two weeks to spare. She checks that a centre near her has dates in that time.

Day 4. Her sentence in *Stuck at 6.5?* was about the day: "I have never sat all four skills in one sitting, and in my second test I ran short of time in Writing." Day 2 was her first full sitting, and it showed the time problem again. She rewrites the sentence with a count: "In my first full sitting I was four minutes short in Writing, because Task 1 took me 27 minutes."

Days 6 to 28. She drills Writing to the sixty-minute plan, and her checkpoints are full tests (3.5). On Day 14 she finishes Writing with no time to spare, and it is marked 6.5. On Days 21 and 28 she finishes with three or four minutes left, and Writing is marked 7.0 and then 6.5. No skill drops in the third hour.

Day 30. With her other three scores kept, Writing 6.5 is enough for a total of 27. She has it twice in a row, and she knows why Writing fell before. *Stuck at 6.5?*, section 6.4, has a row for exactly this: a wobble, one step, and a known cause. She books a One Skill Retake of Writing.

6.4 Karim: more than one sprint

Day 1. Karim's last result was Listening 7.5, Reading 7.5, Writing 5.5 and Speaking 6.0, a total of 26.5. For "7.0 overall" he would be one step away, and Writing or Speaking could give it to him. But his requirement says "7.0 in each skill". That is five steps: three in Writing and two in

Speaking. Five steps across two skills is more than one sprint, and this book does not pretend otherwise. He runs a sprint anyway, as a first stage, not as a plan to book the test.

Days 4 to 28. His teacher marks the same three problems in every essay: a position that changes between the start and the end, ideas listed but not explained, and mistakes in most long sentences. He takes them one at a time, starting with the position. By Checkpoint 1 it holds, and on Day 15 he moves on to the second. Writing is marked 6.0 at Checkpoint 2, and then 5.5 on Day 28.

Day 30. One hit and one miss: neither counts (5.2). His counts moved, so this is "moved, but not there". He starts a second sprint on the second fix. Nobody can tell him how many more he will need, and this book does not try.

6.5 The four, side by side

Candidate: wall	Day 2	Day 14	Day 21	Day 28	Day 30
Mai: Writing	6.0	6.0	6.5	6.5	Full resit
Arjun: Listening	6.5	7.0	7.0	7.0	Done
Arjun: Speaking	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	Second sprint
Sofia: the day (Writing)	6.0	6.5	7.0	6.5	Writing retake
Karim: Writing	5.5	5.5	6.0	5.5	Second sprint

Part 7 — Your sprint sheet

Copy these two pages before Day 1. The first is the month. The second is your evidence.

7.1 The month

Week	Day by day	Done
1	1 requirement and steps · 2 Checkpoint 0, full test · 3 take it apart · 4 pattern and sentence · 5 hours and marker's dates · 6 drill · 7 rest	
2	8–12 drill · 13 rest · 14 Checkpoint 1, wall skill	
3	15 read it · 16–19 drill · 20 rest · 21 Checkpoint 2, wall skill	
4	22 read it · 23–26 drill at test speed · 27 rest · 28 Checkpoint 3, full test	
5	29 take it apart · 30 decide	

Before Day 1 and in Week 1	
My requirement, word for word	
My steps, and the skills they can come from	
My wall, in one sentence, with a count	
My marker, and the dates (Days 2, 14, 21, 28)	
My new material: two full tests, two more in my wall skill	

7.2 The evidence

Checkpoint	Day	Which test	My count	Score or mark	On target?
0	2				
1	14				
2	21				
3	28				

All four skills	Day 2	Day 28	Did any cleared skill drop?
Listening			
Reading			
Writing			
Speaking			

Three questions for Day 30. Answer each one in a single line.

- 1. Were Checkpoints 2 and 3 both on target, on different material? (5.2)**
- 2. What is different since my last result, in one sentence with a number? (5.3)**
- 3. So which is it: book (which test, and why), a second sprint, or back to Day 3? (5.3 to 5.5)**

If you cannot answer the second question with a number, do not book.
The count is the whole point of the thirty days.

The end

You started this book with a 6.5 and a month. You finish it with a sentence, a count, four checkpoints and a decision. That decision may be to book. It may be to run the plan again. Either way it rests on evidence you can show someone, not on how ready you feel.

Thirty days of the same drill can feel slow. Most of the month is the same hour, aimed at the same thing, with nothing new in it. That is what the plan asks for. The candidates who get past 6.5 are rarely the ones who sat the most practice tests. They are the ones who found what was holding the band, worked on that alone, and checked that it had moved before they paid for the next test.

About the candidates and their thirty days. Mai, Arjun, Sofia and Karim, their scores and their months were invented for *Stuck at 6.5?* and for this book. The test facts are from ielts.org, checked when this edition was written. The hours and the minutes in the plan are this book's own working figures. Rules like these get adjusted over time. Confirm the current ones with ielts.org before you rely on them.

Good luck with the test, and with whatever it is a step toward.

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This edition was updated October 2026.

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The four candidates in this book, their scores and their thirty days were invented.

The test facts are from ielts.org; nothing here is official IELTS content.