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Band 7 Writing Task 2

What examiners count, what separates a 6 from a 7, and five model essays taken apart line by line.

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Band 7 Writing Task 2

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What this book is

This book is about one thing: Task 2 of the IELTS writing test.

It is for people who already write reasonable English and keep getting 6 or 6.5. That is the most crowded score in IELTS. Most people stuck there are not making basic mistakes. They are making a small number of specific ones, and nobody has told them which.

Every essay in this book was written for this book. There are no past papers here and no "real exam questions" — those are owned by the people who run the test, and copying them would be theft. The questions here are written in the same style, which is all you need.

Academic or General Training?

Both. Task 2 is the same task in both tests, and it is marked the same way.

The only difference is flavour. Academic questions lean towards public subjects: government, research, technology. General Training questions lean towards daily life: work, neighbours, money, family. The five question types in Part 2 are identical, and the essays are marked against the same four things.

The questions in this book are mixed on purpose. If you are taking General Training, do not skip the ones that sound academic. The thinking is the same.

How to use it

Read Part 1 once, properly. It is short, and everything else depends on it.

Then work through Part 2 one chapter at a time. Do not read all five in one sitting. Read the question type, cover the model essay, write your own answer in 40 minutes, and only then read ours. Reading a model essay without writing one first feels productive and teaches you almost nothing.

Part 3 is a list of the specific habits that hold people at 6. Read it after you have written three or four essays, when you can recognise yourself in it.

Part 4 has ten questions with no model answers. That is deliberate.

One honest note

No book can promise you a score. Anyone who promises you a band is selling something.

What this book can do is show you what the standard actually is, in detail, so you stop guessing. The writing is still yours to do.

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Part 1 — How Task 2 is actually marked



1.1 The four things being counted

Your essay is not given one score. It is given four, and they are averaged.

Most people know this and still write as if there were only one. They spend their effort on vocabulary, because vocabulary feels like the thing that makes writing look clever, and they lose marks somewhere else entirely.

Here are the four, with the plain question the examiner is really asking.

Task Response — did you answer the whole question, and say what you think?

Not part of the question. All of it. If the question has two parts, both parts need real paragraphs. If it asks what you think, your opinion has to be visible and it has to stay the same from the first paragraph to the last.

Coherence and Cohesion — can the reader follow you without going back?

This is about order, not about linking words. Can someone read your essay once, at normal speed, and never have to re-read a sentence to work out what it connects to? That is coherence. Each paragraph should have one idea, and the reader should be able to say what it was.

Lexical Resource — do you use the right word?

Not the impressive word. The right one. Range matters, but precision matters more. A common word used exactly beats a rare word used almost correctly, every time.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy — do you vary your sentences without breaking them?

Two things at once, and they pull against each other. You need variety, so short simple sentences only will hold you down. You also need accuracy, so complex sentences that fall apart will hold you down too.

The part that changes how you should study

The four scores are averaged. So your weakest one drags everything.

Say you are a 7 in vocabulary, a 7 in grammar, a 7 in coherence — and a 5 in Task Response, because you only answered half the question. Your average is 6.5. All that English, and the score comes from the thing that took you thirty seconds to get wrong.

This is why people plateau. They keep improving the criterion they are already best at. If you want to move, find the lowest one and work on that.

1.2 Band 6 against band 7

This is the most useful page in the book. Everything in Part 2 refers back to it.

	A band 6 answer	A band 7 answer
Task Response	Answers the question, but some parts get thin. The opinion is there somewhere, but it drifts or arrives late	Answers every part. The position is clear in the introduction and unchanged at the end. Ideas are developed, not just listed
Coherence and Cohesion	Roughly organised. Linking words appear, sometimes the wrong ones, sometimes too many. Paragraphs may hold two ideas or half of one	The argument moves one step per paragraph. Each paragraph opens with the idea it is about. Linking is mostly invisible, because the ideas already connect
Lexical Resource	Enough words to do the job. Some wrong choices and odd collocations, but the meaning survives	Enough range to be exact and to avoid repeating yourself. Unusual words turn up where they fit, not as decoration. Mistakes are too rare to distract
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Short and long sentences both appear, but the long ones break more often. Mistakes are frequent without usually stopping the reader	Several sentence patterns handled comfortably. You could read most of the essay and find nothing wrong in it

Read the right-hand column again and notice what is *not* in it.

There is no "sophisticated vocabulary". No "advanced structures". No long words. Band 7 is not band 6 with decoration added. It is band 6 done cleanly, completely, and on purpose.

That is good news. It means the distance is smaller than it feels, and it means the work is specific rather than vague.

1.3 The forty minutes

You get about 40 minutes for Task 2. Use them like this.

5 minutes — plan. 30 minutes — write. 5 minutes — check.

Almost nobody does the first five. It feels like losing writing time. Here is the argument that should change your mind.

An unplanned essay does not lose marks in one place. It loses them in two. Task Response suffers, because you find your real opinion in paragraph three and the introduction no longer matches it. Coherence suffers at the same time, because the order of your paragraphs is the order the ideas happened to arrive in.

Two criteria out of four. Half your score, damaged by the same five minutes you saved.

A plan does not need sentences. It needs a position, two main ideas, one example for each, and the order. Five lines of notes. You will see exactly what that looks like in every chapter of Part 2.

1.4 Length, and the cost of being short

You must write at least 250 words. This is not a suggestion, and the penalty is applied directly.

Two practical points.

Know what 250 words looks like in your own handwriting.

Count the words on one full page you have written, once, and remember the number. In the exam you will not have time to count, and guessing badly in either direction is expensive.

Longer is not better. Aim for about 270 to 290. Beyond that you are usually repeating yourself, and repetition is visible. A 400-word essay is not a stronger essay; it is normally a 280-word essay with padding, and padding costs you in Lexical Resource and in Task Response at the same time.

Write enough to develop two ideas properly. Then stop.

2.1 Opinion

"To what extent do you agree or disagree?"

What this type asks

It asks what you think, and how strongly.

You are given a statement and asked to take a position on it. You can agree, disagree, or agree with part of it. All three are safe. What is not safe is having no position at all.

The trap: the essay that quietly changes its mind.

This is the most common way to lose Task Response marks on an opinion question. The writer agrees in the introduction, spends the second paragraph listing the other side because it felt balanced, and arrives at a conclusion that no longer matches the opening. Nothing in it is wrong. It simply does not hold a position, and holding a position is the task.

If you agree with part of the statement, say exactly which part in the introduction. "Partly" is a position. "It depends" is not.

The question

Some governments charge drivers a fee to enter the centre of a city during busy hours. Some people say this is the best way to reduce traffic.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

The plan — five lines, five minutes

Position: charge works, but not BEST. Public transport is better.

P1: yes it works – free driving = no reason to switch. London, traffic fell.

P2: but only if alternative exists – otherwise rich pay, road refills.

P3: transport removes the reason instead of punishing. Slower, costlier.

End: keep it, but not the best tool.

Notice there is no sentence in that plan. Notice also that the position is written first, before any ideas. That order matters — ideas chosen after a position tend to support it.

The model essay

Charging drivers to enter city centres at peak times has become common in large cities, and it does reduce the number of cars on the road. I do not believe it is the best solution, however. Congestion charging treats the symptom, while better public transport treats the cause.

The case for the charge is straightforward. Driving into a busy centre is currently free, so people who could travel another way have no reason to. Putting a price on it changes that calculation immediately. London saw traffic inside its charging zone fall sharply within a year of introducing the scheme, and the money raised can be spent on roads and buses. As a short-term measure, it works.

The problem is what it assumes. A charge only pushes people out of their cars if they have somewhere else to go. In cities where buses are slow and trains are crowded, drivers do not switch; they simply pay, and the road

fills up again with those who can afford it. The result is a quieter centre for wealthier drivers rather than a city that moves better. It also does nothing for people who were never driving in the first place, who usually have the worst commute of anyone.

Investing in public transport works the other way round. A train every five minutes removes the reason to drive instead of punishing the choice, and it improves daily life at every income level. It is slower to build and far more expensive, which is exactly why governments prefer the charge.

Congestion charging is a useful tool and I would keep it. I would not call it the best one.

(288 words)

Why it scores

Task Response. The position appears in sentence two and never moves. Read the introduction and the conclusion on their own: *"I do not believe it is the best solution"* and *"I would not call it the best one."* Same claim, different words. That is what a sustained position looks like, and it takes no extra skill — only a plan written before the essay.

Notice also that the essay answers the actual question. The statement was not "congestion charging works". It was "congestion charging is **the best way**". The essay argues against *best*, and concedes *works*. Answering the precise claim, rather than the general topic, is most of Task Response.

Coherence and Cohesion. Four paragraphs, four jobs: position, the case for, the flaw, the better alternative. Each paragraph states its centre in the first sentence — *"The case for the charge is straightforward."* /

"The problem is what it assumes." You could read only the opening sentences and still follow the argument.

Count the linking words. There are almost none. No "Firstly", no "Moreover", no "In conclusion". The paragraphs connect because each one answers a question raised by the one before it. That is cohesion doing its job invisibly, and it scores higher than signposting does.

Lexical Resource. The vocabulary is mostly ordinary. What lifts it is precision:

- *"treats the symptom ... treats the cause"* — one metaphor, used once, carrying the whole argument.
- *"changes that calculation"* — better than "makes people think again", because it says what kind of thinking.
- *"the road fills up again with those who can afford it"* — the entire criticism in one clause.

There is no word here that a band 6 writer does not already know. The difference is choosing them.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Sentence length varies deliberately. The paragraph on the flaw runs long, then lands on a short one. The essay ends on two short sentences, which is why the ending feels decided rather than trailing off.

The semicolon in *"drivers do not switch; they simply pay"* is worth copying. It joins two ideas that belong together without a linking word, and it is difficult to get wrong.

The same paragraph at band 6

Here is the third paragraph rewritten a band lower. The idea is identical.

However, there is also a problem with this. If people don't have other ways to travel, they will not stop driving. In many cities the buses are very bad and the trains are always full of people. So the rich people will just pay the money and continue to drive their cars, and the road will be full again. Moreover, it is not good for the poor people who cannot drive anyway.

What actually changed?

- **The centre is missing.** It opens with "there is also a problem" — but *what* problem? The band 7 version names it immediately: the charge assumes an alternative exists.
- **"Very bad", "always full", "not good".** Vague where the original was specific. This is a Lexical Resource loss, and it is about precision, not about rare words.
- **"Moreover" is doing nothing.** The last sentence is not an addition to the previous one; it is a different group of people. The linking word points the reader the wrong way.
- **"The rich people", "the poor people".** The article is wrong, and it repeats. Small, frequent errors like this are exactly what separates *"errors are frequent"* from *"most sentences have no error"*.

Nothing here is a disaster. That is the point. Band 6 is not bad writing. It is writing that is slightly loose in four places at once.

2.2 Discussion

"Discuss both views and give your own opinion."

What this type asks

Two things, and it is easy to miss the second.

You must explain both views fairly — not one view properly and the other in a sentence — and you must also say which one you find stronger.

The trap: the balanced essay with no opinion in it.

This is the single most expensive mistake in Task 2, because it is invisible while you are writing. The essay looks mature. It gives both sides generously. It ends with something like *"both views have advantages and it depends on the situation"* — and it has not done the task.

The instruction says *and give your own opinion*. If your opinion is not there, Task Response is capped no matter how good the English is. A reader should be able to finish your essay and tell a friend which side you were on.

One more thing: your opinion is not a fifth paragraph bolted on at the end. Put it in the introduction, and let the essay carry it.

The question

Some people think children should begin learning a foreign language in primary school. Others believe secondary school is early enough.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

The plan — five lines, five minutes

Opinion: primary – BUT only with a trained teacher.

View A (secondary): crowded timetable, weak teachers, teens learn grammar faster.

View B (primary): accent window closes ~10; absorb without translating. Cousin example.

Me: B stronger, with the condition. Bad early teaching = worse than none.

End: the real argument is about resources, not children.

Notice the opinion is line one again, before either view is written down. If you decide at the end, the two views come out unbalanced and the conclusion arrives as a surprise.

The model essay

Language teaching now starts earlier in many countries than it did a generation ago, and not everyone thinks this is an improvement. Both sides have a reasonable case, though I believe the evidence favours starting young.

Those who prefer secondary school usually argue from practicality. Young children learn slowly in formal lessons, and a primary timetable is already crowded with reading, writing and mathematics. An hour of French at the age of seven, taught by someone who barely speaks French, may achieve very little. Teenagers, by contrast, can study grammar deliberately and make visible progress in months. On this view an early start simply wastes time that the basics need.

The argument for primary school rests on something different. It is not about speed but about sound. Children who hear a second language before roughly the age of ten tend to keep a pronunciation close to a native speaker's, and that advantage fades as they get older. They also absorb language without translating it first, a habit most adult learners never recover. My cousin moved country at six and now sounds local in both her languages; her brother, who moved at fourteen, does not.

I find the second argument stronger, with one condition attached. An early start only helps if the teaching is good. A badly taught primary class is worse than no class at all, because it convinces children the language is dull before they are old enough to judge. Where trained specialists exist, primary school is clearly the better time to begin.

Both sides are really arguing about resources rather than about children.

(287 words)

Why it scores

Task Response. Read the introduction: *"I believe the evidence favours starting young."* Read paragraph four: *"I find the second argument stronger, with one condition attached."* The opinion is stated twice and

developed once. It is impossible to finish this essay and not know the writer's position.

Both views also get real space — a full paragraph each, and the one the writer disagrees with is given its best argument rather than a weak version. That matters. An essay that makes the opposing view sound stupid reads as unbalanced, and unbalanced discussion costs Task Response marks even when the opinion is clear.

The condition in paragraph four is what lifts this above a simple "I agree". *"Only if the teaching is good"* is a qualified position, and qualified positions are what developed ideas look like.

Coherence and Cohesion. The structure is the plainest one available: view, view, opinion, close. Do not be embarrassed by that. Plain structures are easy to follow, and easy to follow is what the criterion rewards.

Look at how paragraph three opens: *"The argument for primary school rests on something different."* The word *different* does the linking. It tells the reader this paragraph stands against the last one, without a single "However" or "On the other hand". Then the next sentence says what the difference is: *"It is not about speed but about sound."*

Lexical Resource. Again, ordinary words used exactly:

- *"argue from practicality"* — three words for an idea most writers spend a sentence on.
- *"that window narrows sharply"* — a metaphor carried from the previous clause, not decoration.
- *"a habit most adult learners never recover"* — *recover* is the precise verb here. Not "get" or "have".

The personal example is worth noticing too. *"My cousin moved country at six"* is specific and verifiable-sounding, and it costs nothing. Invented examples are perfectly acceptable in Task 2. Vague ones are not.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The semicolon in the third paragraph does real work: it puts the cousin and the brother side by side so the contrast lands without being explained.

Note *"Where trained specialists exist, primary school is clearly the better time to begin."* A fronted clause, comfortable and correct. One structure like this per paragraph is plenty. Five is showing off, and showing off is where accuracy breaks.

The same paragraph at band 6

The fourth paragraph — the opinion — rewritten a band lower.

In my opinion, I think that the second argument is better. But it depends on the teacher. If the teacher is good, then the children will learn very well, but if the teacher is not good, then it is not useful and maybe the children will not like the language in the future. So in conclusion I agree with starting in primary school but only in some situations.

What changed?

- **"In my opinion, I think"** — the same idea twice. Small, but it is the first thing on the page and it sets the level.
- **"It depends" arrives before the condition is explained.** The band 7 version states the condition as a claim — *"An early start only*

helps if the teaching is good" — then explains it. This version says "it depends" and leaves the reader waiting.

- **"Good" and "not good" carry the whole paragraph.** Two uses of the vaguest adjective in English where the original had *badly taught, convinces children the language is dull, trained specialists*.
- **"In some situations"** is where the position quietly dissolves. It sounds like a qualification but names nothing. Compare: *"Where trained specialists exist."*
- **"So in conclusion"** inside the middle of the essay signals that the writer is finishing because they have run out, not because the argument is complete.

The ideas in both versions are the same. Only one of them is committed to anything.

2.3 Advantages and disadvantages

"Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?"

What this type asks

It asks you to weigh, not to list.

The word doing the work is **outweigh**. The question is not "what are the good and bad points" — that is a question a ten-year-old could answer. It is "which side is heavier, and why".

The trap: the shopping list.

A very common answer gives three advantages, then three disadvantages, then says both are important. Every point in it may be true. It still scores badly, because the task was to compare them and the essay only collected them.

Two habits fix this.

First, decide which side is heavier before you write, and say so in the introduction. Second, make sure at least one paragraph explicitly puts the two sides against each other. Somewhere in your essay there should be a sentence that means *"this outweighs that, and here is why"*.

A useful test: could someone rearrange your paragraphs in any order without damage? If yes, you listed. If no, you weighed.

The question

More people now work from home instead of travelling to an office every day.

Do the advantages of this development outweigh the disadvantages?

The plan — five lines, five minutes

Verdict: advantages win – but not for everyone. Depends on career stage.

Adv: time. 10 hrs/wk commute unpaid. Money. Parent at 3:30 = job possible at all.

Dis: juniors lose sideways learning. Isolation for people living alone.

WEIGH: the costs have fixes, the commute doesn't. ← this is the essay

End: mix the two, don't go back.

Line four is the one that matters. If your plan has no weighing line, your essay will be a list.

The model essay

Home working stopped being unusual several years ago and is now a normal arrangement across whole industries. Weighing the two sides, I think the gains are clearly larger, although the balance shifts depending on who is doing the working.

The clearest advantage is time. A commute of an hour each way costs a worker around ten hours a week, unpaid, and returns nothing. Removing it gives that time back to sleep, family or exercise, and all three show up later in how well someone does the job. The money matters too: no fare, no lunch bought near the office. For a parent who must collect a child at half past three, the difference is not convenience — it decides whether the job is possible at all.

The costs are real, but they fall unevenly. The most serious one lands on new employees. Skill in most professions is picked up sideways: overhearing how a colleague handles an angry client, asking the small question that is not worth writing an email about. A junior working alone at home learns the tasks and misses the profession. Isolation is the second cost, and it weighs far more on people who live by themselves.

What decides it for me is that the disadvantages have solutions and the commute does not. A team can meet twice a week, pair new staff with someone experienced, and protect that informal learning on purpose. Nobody has yet found a way to make an hour on a crowded train useful.

The advantages therefore outweigh the disadvantages for most established workers, and the case is much weaker for someone in a first job. That is an argument for mixing the two, not for going back.

(291 words)

Why it scores

Task Response. The verdict is in the second sentence — *"the gains are clearly larger"* — and it is qualified immediately: *"the balance shifts depending on who is doing the working."* That qualification is not

hedging. It is answered later, precisely, when the essay separates established workers from juniors.

The fourth paragraph is the whole reason this essay outscores a list. *"The disadvantages have solutions and the commute does not"* is a comparison, not an addition. It gives a reason why one side is heavier rather than asserting that it is.

Notice the final sentence: *"an argument for mixing the two, not for going back."* The essay answers the question that was asked and then says what follows from the answer. That is what a developed idea looks like — one more step than the question demanded, not one more example.

Coherence and Cohesion. Four paragraphs: verdict, the case for, the case against, the weighing. The order is not decorative. Paragraph four cannot be moved anywhere else, because it depends on both of the paragraphs before it. That is the test from the top of this chapter, passed.

Each paragraph names its own centre early — *"The clearest advantage is time."* / *"The costs are real, but they fall unevenly."* / *"What decides it for me is..."* You could read those three sentences alone and reconstruct the argument.

Lexical Resource. The precision is in the verbs and in the specifics.

- *"picked up sideways"* — an idea most writers would need a full sentence for.
- *"learns the tasks and misses the profession"* — the contrast sits inside the sentence, not around it.
- *"ten hours a week, unpaid"* — one word, *unpaid*, does more than a sentence of complaint.

- *"the balance shifts", "the costs fall unevenly", "weighs far more on"* — the weighing metaphor from the question is carried right through the essay. Picking up the question's own image is a cheap and reliable way to look precise.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy. The colon in *"the money matters too: no fare, no lunch bought near the office"* allows two fragments to work as a list without becoming a clumsy sentence.

The dash in *"the difference is not convenience — it decides whether the job is possible at all"* does the same job a semicolon would, with more emphasis. Use one of these per essay, not four.

The same paragraph at band 6

The weighing paragraph — the most important one — a band lower.

In my view, the advantages are more than the disadvantages. Firstly, the companies can save money on the office. Secondly, the workers are more happy and they can spend time with their family. Moreover, it is also good for the environment because there is less pollution from the cars. Therefore, I think that working from home has more advantages than disadvantages.

What changed?

- **It stopped weighing and started listing.** Three new advantages appear in the paragraph that was supposed to compare. The disadvantages are not mentioned once. This is the trap, and it is worth reading the paragraph twice to feel how natural it is to fall into.

- **"Firstly, Secondly, Moreover, Therefore."** Four signposts in five sentences. They are pointing at a structure that is not there — every item is simply another advantage, so *Moreover* is the only honest one.
- **"More happy."** A small error, and the kind that repeats.
- **The conclusion restates the introduction word for word.** Nothing was added by the paragraph, so the ending has nothing to land on.
- **New ideas in the final paragraph.** Company savings and pollution appear for the first time in the conclusion and are never developed. Both are good points. Both needed to be in paragraph two, or not at all.

2.4 Problem and solution

"What problems does this cause, and what can be done about it?" (also appears as "What are the causes, and what solutions can you suggest?")

What this type asks

Two parts, and they must fit together.

Part one asks what goes wrong. Part two asks what to do. Both need real paragraphs — this is not a question with an opinion bolted on.

The trap: solutions that answer a different problem.

This is the specific failure of this question type, and it is easy to miss in your own writing. The essay names two problems, then offers two solutions, and the solutions do not correspond to the problems. A reader notices immediately; the writer almost never does.

The fix is mechanical. In your plan, draw a line from each solution back to the problem it solves. If a solution has no line, cut it, however good it is. If a problem has no line, either solve it or do not raise it.

Note also that "problems" and "causes" are different questions. *What problems does this cause* asks about consequences — what follows from it. *What are the causes* asks what produced it. Read which one you were given. Answering the wrong one is a Task Response failure, not a small slip.

The question

In many cities, young people on average salaries can no longer afford to buy a home.

What problems does this cause, and what can be done about it?

The plan — five lines, five minutes

P1: delayed lives – children postponed, birth rates fall. Rent transfers income to owners.

P2: cities lose essential workers – nurses/teachers can't live near centre.

S1 → P1&P2: build more, modest homes. Vienna.

S2 → P1: tax empty/second homes. Faster than building.

End: obstacle is political, not technical. Owners benefit from high prices.

The arrows are the point. Each solution is tied to a numbered problem before a word is written.

The model essay

In most large cities, someone earning an average salary can no longer expect to buy a place to live. The consequences reach well beyond housing itself, and the available remedies are slower and less popular than governments usually admit.

The first problem is that people postpone the rest of their lives. Couples who cannot afford a home delay having children, often past the point at which they wanted them, and birth rates in expensive cities have fallen

accordingly. Renting indefinitely also transfers a large share of a young worker's income to somebody who already owns property, so the gap between the two groups widens every year without either of them doing anything. The second problem is that cities lose the workers they depend on. When nurses, teachers and drivers cannot live within an hour of the centre, the city stops working properly, and higher salaries do not fix it, because what is short is housing rather than money.

The most direct remedy is to build far more homes, and specifically the modest kind that first-time buyers actually need rather than the expensive flats that are most profitable. Cities which have taken this seriously, Vienna with its long public housing programme being the clearest example, have held costs within reach of ordinary salaries for decades. Building is slow, however, so it needs pairing with something quicker: taxing empty and second properties heavily, which several countries have now begun, discourages buying housing purely as an investment.

Neither measure is welcome to existing owners, whose wealth depends on prices staying high. That is the real obstacle, and it is political rather than technical. We are not short of ideas.

(287 words)

Why it scores

Task Response. Both halves of the question are answered in full paragraphs, and the halves are connected. Building addresses both problems — supply brings prices down for young families and lets essential workers live nearby. The property tax addresses the first specifically. Nothing is offered that solves nothing.

The essay also answers the question it was given. It was asked for *problems caused*, and it gives consequences: delayed children, transferred income, cities losing staff. It never drifts into *causes* of high prices, which is the neighbouring question and a very easy one to answer by accident.

The last line is doing quiet work. *"We are not short of ideas"* re-frames everything above it: the problem is not knowledge but politics. That is one step past the question, which is what separates a developed answer from a complete one.

Coherence and Cohesion. Two problems in one paragraph, two solutions in the next, then a short close. The internal signposting is minimal but exact — *"The first problem is..."*, *"The second problem is..."*, *"The most direct remedy..."* — and it is used where it genuinely helps the reader count, which is the one place signposting earns its space.

"Building is slow, however, so it needs pairing with something quicker" is the hinge of the whole essay. It admits a weakness in the first solution and uses that weakness to introduce the second. Cohesion here comes from the argument, not from a connector.

Lexical Resource. Watch the precision on abstract nouns, which is where most band 6 essays go soft:

- *"transfers a large share of a young worker's income"* — not "wastes money".
- *"what is short is housing rather than money"* — the entire diagnosis in nine words.
- *"discourages buying housing purely as an investment"* — purely is carrying the whole distinction between a home and an asset.

- *"welcome to existing owners", "political rather than technical"* — plain words, exact fit.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy. *"Cities which have taken this seriously, Vienna with its long public housing programme being the clearest example, have held costs..."* is the most ambitious sentence in the book. The subject is separated from its verb by a long insertion and the sentence still holds together.

Attempt one sentence like this per essay. Not three. If you are not confident it will survive, write two clean sentences instead — accuracy is scored alongside range, and a broken ambitious sentence loses on both.

The same paragraph at band 6

The solutions paragraph, a band lower.

There are some solutions for this problem. Firstly, the government should build more houses for the people, then the price will go down and everyone can buy a house. Secondly, the government should give money to young people to help them. Moreover, people should try to save more money every month and not spend it on unnecessary things like expensive coffee.

What changed?

- **The third solution answers nothing.** Personal saving does not address either problem the essay raised, and it quietly blames the people the essay was about. A solution that does not connect to a

stated problem is worse than no solution, because it shows the two halves were written separately.

- **"Give money to young people"** sounds helpful but makes the problem worse — more buyers, same number of homes, higher prices. Solutions need one sentence of *why it works*. Without it, an examiner cannot tell whether the idea was reasoned or guessed.
- **"For the people", "everyone can buy a house."** Over-generalising. The band 7 version says *modest homes for first-time buyers*, which is a claim you can actually defend.
- **"Firstly, Secondly, Moreover"** again marking a list rather than an argument.
- **No example anywhere.** Vienna cost the original writer six words and made the claim concrete.

The English in this paragraph is not much weaker. The thinking is, and Task Response is where that shows.

2.5 Two-part question

"Why is this happening? Is it a positive or negative development?"

What this type asks

Exactly what it says: two separate questions, both of which need answering properly.

This type is sometimes called the "direct questions" essay. The two questions are usually different in kind — one asks for explanation, the other for judgement — and that is what makes it awkward.

The trap: the second question in one sentence.

Almost everyone answers the first question well. It is concrete, and there is plenty to say. Then the essay runs short of time and space, and the second question gets a single line near the end, usually *"In my opinion this is a positive development."*

Both questions carry equal weight. Half-answering one of them limits Task Response no matter how strong the other half is.

Plan the second answer first if you have to. And give it its own paragraph — a judgement that lives inside the conclusion always reads as an afterthought, because it is one.

The question

Many people now buy second-hand clothes instead of new ones.

Why is this happening? Is it a positive or a negative development?

The plan — five lines, five minutes

Verdict FIRST (so it doesn't get squeezed): positive, with one real cost.

Why 1: cheap new clothes wear out fast – buying used is cheaper over time. Wool coat.

Why 2: environmental, esp. young. Resale apps made it easy – intention existed, market didn't.

Positive: displaces manufacture; weakens "clothes are disposable".

Cost: charity shop prices rise, pushes out people buying from necessity. → more supply, not fewer buyers.

Writing the verdict on line one is a deliberate defence against the trap. If it is in the plan, it gets a paragraph.

The model essay

Buying clothes second-hand once suggested that a person could not afford new ones. Over the past decade it has become an ordinary choice, and in some circles a fashionable one. Two forces explain the shift, and on balance I consider it a positive development.

The first reason is cost, and it has moved in an unexpected direction. New clothing is cheaper than it has ever been, but it is also made to last a much shorter time, so someone who repeatedly buys new often spends

more than someone who occasionally buys something well made and used. A wool coat made thirty years ago will usually outlast three cheap ones bought today. The second reason is environmental concern, which is strongest among younger buyers. The clothing industry produces an enormous volume of waste, and people who have grown up hearing this are less willing to add to it. Resale websites and apps then made acting on that belief simple, which is the practical half of the explanation: the intention existed well before the marketplace did.

I regard the change as positive for two reasons. It reduces waste directly, because a garment worn by a second owner replaces the manufacture of a new one. More importantly, it weakens the assumption that clothing is disposable, and that assumption does more damage over time than any individual purchase.

There is one genuine cost. As buying used becomes fashionable, prices in charity shops rise, and those who shop there out of necessity are pushed out. That is a real harm falling on the people least able to absorb it. It is an argument for increasing supply, though, rather than for buying less.

(292 words)

Why it scores

Task Response. Count the paragraphs given to each question. One long paragraph explains *why*, with two developed reasons. One paragraph gives the *judgement*, with two reasons of its own. A fourth paragraph raises the strongest objection to that judgement and answers it.

That last paragraph is what makes the essay feel adult. The writer has taken a position, then gone looking for the best argument against it, and

dealt with it honestly instead of pretending it does not exist. It costs three sentences and it is the difference between an opinion and a considered one.

Notice the verdict appears in the introduction — *"on balance I consider it a positive development"* — long before the paragraph that defends it. The trap for this question type is structural, and the introduction is where you defuse it.

Coherence and Cohesion. *"The first reason is cost"* and *"The second reason is environmental concern"* sit inside one paragraph rather than getting a paragraph each. That is a deliberate choice: both belong to the same question, so keeping them together tells the reader where the answer to question one ends and the answer to question two begins.

The colon in *"the practical half of the explanation: the intention existed well before the marketplace did"* is the neatest cohesive move in the book. It links a general claim to its precise meaning without a connector.

Lexical Resource. The essay never once uses "eco-friendly", "nowadays" or "trend", which is where this topic normally goes.

- *"in some circles a fashionable one"* — *circles* is exact and unshowy.
- *"displaces" / "replaces the manufacture of a new one"* — the mechanism, not the sentiment.
- *"those who shop there out of necessity"* — precise, and notably not "poor people".
- *"falling on the people least able to absorb it"* — *absorb* is the right verb for a cost.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Look at the last two sentences.

"That is a real harm falling on the people least able to absorb it. It is an argument for increasing supply, though, rather than for buying less."

The mid-sentence *though* is a small, natural touch that non-native writers rarely attempt, and it is completely correct here. The parallel structure at the end — *for increasing supply ... for buying less* — makes a contrast land without needing a connector to announce it.

The same paragraph at band 6

The judgement paragraph — the one that usually gets squeezed — a band lower.

In my opinion, I believe that this is a positive development because it is good for the environment and also people can save their money. Nowadays, the pollution is a very big problem in the world and we should protect our planet for the future generations. In conclusion, buying second-hand clothes is a good trend and more people should do it.

What changed?

- **It repeats question one instead of answering question two.**

Cost and environment were the *reasons this is happening*. Here they come back as the *reasons it is good*. The paragraph looks full and adds nothing, which is the most common way this question type is under-answered.

- **"Protect our planet for the future generations."** Memorised, unconnected to clothes, and the kind of phrase examiners have read

thousands of times. It lowers Lexical Resource rather than raising it — see 3.1.

- **"Nowadays", "a very big problem in the world", "a good trend."** Three vague phrases where the original had *displaces the manufacture of a new one* and *weakens the assumption that clothing is disposable*.
- **No objection anywhere.** The band 7 version's fourth paragraph has no counterpart here. Nothing is weighed, so the judgement costs the writer nothing to make.
- **"In my opinion, I believe"** — doubled again, and *"In conclusion"* on a paragraph that is not the conclusion.

Part 3 — What keeps people at band 6



Read this part after you have written three or four essays, not before. It is a list of specific habits, and it is much more useful when you can recognise your own writing in it.

None of these are dramatic mistakes. That is exactly why they survive. A dramatic mistake gets corrected by the first teacher who sees it; these ones look like normal writing.

3.1 Memorised phrases

Start here, because this is the habit that people believe is helping them.

"It is a well-known fact that..." "Since time immemorial, humans have..." "This essay will discuss both sides of this controversial issue." "In today's modern world, technology plays a vital role in our daily lives."

These are learned from websites and repeated in millions of essays. Examiners have read every one of them thousands of times, and they are trained to look past language that could have been attached to any question at all.

The cost is worse than neutral. Lexical Resource rewards words chosen for *this* question. A memorised opening is by definition not chosen for this question, so it does not count towards your range, and the contrast with your own sentences makes the rest look weaker than it is.

There is a simple test. Could this sentence appear, unchanged, in an essay about a completely different topic? If yes, delete it.

What to write instead. Open with something that could only belong to this question. Look at the introductions in Part 2: *"Language teaching now starts earlier in many countries than it did a generation ago."* *"Buying clothes second-hand once suggested that a person could not afford new ones."* Neither is clever. Both are specific, and specific is the whole trick.

3.2 Answering half the question

The most expensive mistake in the book, and the cheapest to fix.

Task 2 questions often contain two instructions. *Discuss both views **and** give your own opinion. Why is this happening? Is it a positive or negative development? What problems does this cause, and what can be done about it?*

Miss the second instruction and Task Response drops immediately, however good the English is. You can be a comfortable band 8 writer and score 6 on this criterion by answering three-quarters of the question.

The thirty-second fix. Before writing anything, underline every instruction word in the prompt. Not the topic — the instructions. Then count them. Write the number at the top of your plan.

When you finish, check that you can point at the paragraph that answers each one. If two instructions are answered in the same paragraph, one of them is probably answered thinly.

3.3 Linking words used as decoration

Firstly. Moreover. Furthermore. In addition. Additionally. Last but not least.

Somewhere in most people's studying, a teacher said that linking words improve cohesion. The result is essays where every paragraph opens with a connector, chosen mainly for variety.

Cohesion is not about signposts. It is about whether the ideas actually connect. A signpost pointing in the wrong direction is worse than no signpost, and *Moreover* in front of a contrast, or *Therefore* in front of something that does not follow, tells the examiner precisely where your control ends.

Look back at the model essay in 2.1. It contains almost no connectors, and it is easy to follow — because each paragraph answers a question the previous one raised.

A rule that works: allow yourself three connectors in an essay. Spend them where the reader genuinely needs help counting, usually *The first problem* / *The second problem*. Everywhere else, make the sentence itself do the linking. "*The problem is what it assumes.*" "*What decides it for me is...*" "*The argument for primary school rests on something different.*"

3.4 Paragraphs with no centre

A band 7 paragraph has one idea. You should be able to say what it was in six words.

Two ways this goes wrong. The first is the paragraph with two ideas in it, usually joined by *Moreover*, where the second idea deserved its own space and now gets three sentences. The second is the paragraph with half an idea — a claim stated and then repeated in different words until it looks long enough.

The test. Read only the first sentence of each of your paragraphs, in order. If those sentences alone tell the argument, your paragraphing is working. Try it on the model essays; it works on all five.

Practical shape. State the idea in sentence one. Explain it in sentence two. Support it with something specific in sentence three. Say what follows from it in sentence four. Four to six sentences is a paragraph; two is a note, and nine is two paragraphs.

3.5 Range against accuracy

These two pull in opposite directions, and understanding the trade-off is worth more than any vocabulary list.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy is one criterion with two halves. Write only short simple sentences and you will be accurate, but your range caps you around 6. Attempt long, ambitious structures and break them, and the range is there but the accuracy caps you around 6 as well. Both roads arrive at the same place, which is why people who improve their grammar sometimes see no change in their score.

The middle path is narrower than people expect: two or three complex structures you can use without thinking. Not ten. Three, reliable.

These three are enough for band 7:

1. **A relative clause.** *"Cities which have taken this seriously have held costs down."*
2. **A conditional.** *"An early start only helps if the teaching is good."*
3. **A fronted subordinate clause.** *"Where trained specialists exist, primary school is the better time to begin." "Although the costs are real, they fall unevenly."*

Use each two or three times in an essay, correctly, and mix in short sentences deliberately. That is a genuine variety of structures, and every one of them is within reach of a band 6 writer today.

On ambition. One sentence per essay may reach beyond what you are certain of. One. If it fails, it costs you a little; if you attempt five and three fail, the examiner sees a pattern, and patterns are what the accuracy half is measuring.

On short sentences. They are not a weakness. *"We are not short of ideas." "Three, reliable."* A short sentence after a long one reads as control, and control is what you are demonstrating.

3.6 Examples that are not examples

"For example, many people believe this." "For instance, there are a lot of studies about this topic." "For example, in some countries the situation is very different."

None of these is an example. Each is a general statement wearing the word *example* in front of it, and adding the phrase does not make the idea more concrete — it only draws attention to the fact that nothing concrete arrived.

An example has at least one specific thing in it: a place, a number, a person, a situation you can picture.

Compare across the model essays: *"London saw traffic inside its charging zone fall sharply."* *"Vienna with its long public housing programme."* *"My cousin moved country at six and now sounds local in both her languages."* *"A wool coat made thirty years ago will usually outlast three cheap ones bought today."*

You are allowed to invent them. Task 2 is not a research test, and nobody checks your facts. The cousin may not exist. What is being measured is whether you can support a claim with something specific, and an invented specific does that job perfectly. A vague truth does not.

One example per body paragraph is plenty. Two is usually one too many, because the second one takes the space that developing the idea needed.

3.7 The last five minutes

When five minutes remain, stop writing and check. In this order, because this is the order that recovers the most marks per second.

1. **Does the conclusion still match the introduction?** If your position moved, fix the introduction — it is one sentence, and it protects your largest criterion.
2. **Is every instruction in the question answered by a paragraph you can point to?** Count them against the number you wrote at the top of your plan.
3. **Articles and plurals.** *a / the / no article*, and singular against plural. These are the most frequent errors in the world for most learners, and they are fast to scan for.
4. **Subject and verb agreement**, especially in your longer sentences, where the subject and verb have drifted apart.
5. **Words you repeated.** If a word appears four times, one of them is worth changing — but only if you are sure of the replacement.

Do not rewrite sentences you merely dislike. With five minutes left, a rewritten sentence is a new chance to make an error, and the marks are not where the dissatisfaction is.

Part 4 — Practice, and the last week



4.1 Ten questions

Two for each question type. In each pair, the first leans Academic and the second leans General Training — but both tests can be given either, so write both.

All ten were written for this book.

There are no model answers here, and that is deliberate. The five models are in Part 2, studied in detail. If you had a model for every question, you would read ten essays and write none, and reading essays does not improve writing.

Give yourself 40 minutes. Five to plan, thirty to write, five to check.

Opinion

1. Universities should offer places only to students with the highest examination results, whatever their background. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

2. Employers should not be allowed to contact their staff about work outside working hours. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Discussion

3. Some people think entry to museums should be free for everybody. Others argue that charging for entry is what allows museums to look after their collections properly. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.
4. Some people spend their whole lives in the town where they were born. Others move frequently for work or study. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Advantages and disadvantages

5. Many universities now teach their courses in English rather than in the local language. Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?
6. More people living in cities are choosing to keep a pet. Do the advantages of this outweigh the disadvantages?

Problem and solution

7. In many countries, fewer young people are choosing to become teachers. What problems does this cause, and what can be done about it?
8. In many neighbourhoods, people no longer know the people living next door. What problems does this cause, and how could the situation be improved?

Two-part question

9. People in many countries are having children later in life than in the past. Why is this happening? Is it a positive or a negative development?
10. Many people now watch films at home rather than going to a cinema. Why is this happening? Is it a positive or a negative development?

4.2 Marking your own essay

You cannot give yourself a band score honestly, and trying is a waste of an evening. What you can do is check for the specific things that separate 6 from 7.

Answer these about your own essay. Write the answers down — thinking "yes, probably" is not the same as answering.

Task Response

- Which sentence states my position? Copy it out.
- Does the conclusion say the same thing as that sentence?
- How many instructions were in the question? Which paragraph answers each?
- Did I answer the precise claim, or the general topic?

Coherence and Cohesion

- Read only the first sentence of each paragraph. Do they tell the argument on their own?
- What is the one idea of paragraph two? Say it in six words.

- How many linking words did I use? Could I remove half of them without losing the reader?

Lexical Resource

- Circle every vague word: *good, bad, very, a lot of, things, nowadays, important*. How many?
- Is there a sentence here that could appear in an essay on any other topic? Delete it.
- Did I use a rare word where a common one was more exact?

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

- How many sentences have no error at all? Count them. This is the number that matters.
- Did I use a relative clause, a conditional, and a fronted clause at least once each?
- Are all my sentences roughly the same length?

The most useful habit is keeping your essays. Write one, put it away for three days, then mark it with this list. Errors you cannot see on the day are obvious by Thursday.

4.3 The last seven days

If your test is next week, this is what is still worth doing.

Worth doing

- **Write four full essays under time.** One of each type you feel least sure about. Timed, by hand if your test is on paper, with no

dictionary. This is the only activity that reliably moves anything this late.

- **Fix your three most frequent errors.** Not all your errors — the three that repeat. Look through your marked essays, find the pattern, and write it on a card. For most people it is articles, plurals, or subject-verb agreement in long sentences.
- **Rehearse your three complex structures** from 3.5 until they are automatic.
- **Learn what 270 words looks like in your handwriting.** Count one page once.

Not worth doing

- **Learning vocabulary lists.** Words learned this week will be used slightly wrongly, and slightly wrong is worse for Lexical Resource than the common word you already own.
- **Memorising introductions or "useful phrases".** See 3.1. This actively lowers your score.
- **Reading more model essays.** You have five in this book, studied properly. A sixth changes nothing; a fourth essay of your own does.
- **Trying to predict the questions.** The topics rotate through the same dozen areas. Preparing a question type is useful, preparing a topic is not.

On the day

Read the question twice. Underline the instructions. Spend the five minutes planning — under pressure this is the first thing people abandon, and it is the one that costs two criteria at once.

Then write plainly, argue one position, and finish with time to check.

The end

You now know what the four criteria are, what separates a 6 from a 7 in each of them, what the five question types ask, and which habits are holding you where you are.

That is genuinely most of it. The rest is essays — written under time, put away for three days, then marked honestly against Part 4.2.

Good luck with the test.

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