

FREE IELTS BOOKS

Vocabulary & Phrasing for Band 7

Sixty-four phrases that actually work, each one shown next to the band-6 near-miss it replaces — not a long list, a small one you can use.

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What this book is

This book contains sixty-four phrases. That is the whole book, and the small number is the point.

You do not need more words. If you are stuck at 6 or 6.5, you almost certainly have enough vocabulary to reach 7 — what you do not yet have is the way English words fit together. English words have habits: rain is *heavy*, not *strong*; you *make* a decision and *do* the shopping. When a sentence ignores those habits, it is understood perfectly and it still sounds assembled. That is most of the distance between band 6 and band 7 vocabulary, and no list of rare words crosses it.

So every phrase in this book comes with two sentences: one where the phrase is doing its job, and the version of the same idea that people write at band 6 — with the exact join that failed pointed at, by name. You will recognise yourself in some of the band 6 sentences. That recognition is the book working.

Every example sentence was written for this book. Nothing here is taken from a real exam.

What this book refuses to do

Give you a long list.

There are sites that will give you three hundred "band 7 words" for free. Learn them the month before the test and you will produce what examiners hear every single day: a memorised word arriving in a sentence that was not built for it, sticking out like a brick in a hedge. A word you have never used in a sentence about your own life is not yours yet, and the exam room is the wrong place to try it for the first time.

Sixty-four phrases you can actually use beat six hundred you can recite. This book would rather be small and honest about it.

How to use it

Read Part 0 first. It explains what the examiner is actually listening for, and it is short.

Then take the eight topic chapters slowly — one at a time, not in one sitting. In each chapter, mark the two or three phrases you did not know, or knew but never use. Those are yours to take. Ignore the rest; collecting all sixty-four is not the goal, using a dozen naturally is.

Each chapter ends by putting three of its phrases to work inside one real answer or paragraph. Read those closely — a phrase on its own is a museum piece, and the point is to see it moving.

Part 2 teaches paraphrase, the one vocabulary skill the test rewards most directly. Part 3 is a list of the habits that keep vocabulary at band 6 — read it when you can hear your own writing in it. Part 4 tells you what to do in the last week, and what to stop doing.

One honest note

No book can promise you a score, and no list of words has ever moved anyone from 6 to 7 by being read.

What this book can do is show you, phrase by phrase, what "natural" actually means — in enough detail that you stop guessing. Using the phrases, out loud and on paper, is still yours to do.

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Part 0 — How vocabulary is actually scored



0.1 What Lexical Resource actually measures

One of the four scores in both Writing and Speaking is called Lexical Resource. The name makes it sound like a stockroom — as if the examiner were counting how many words you own. They are not.

What is being judged is closer to this: do you have more than one way to say a common idea, do your words fit the topic and the situation, and do they fit *each other*? A band 6 answer has enough vocabulary to say everything it needs to say, and uses it a little wrongly — odd pairings, words slightly off their natural register, the same noun repeated because no alternative came. A band 7 answer is not full of rare words. It is full of ordinary words in the right places, with some flexibility when the first word is not quite right.

That last part matters. Flexibility — being able to go around a word you cannot find, or restate an idea without repeating yourself — counts for

more than rarity. A candidate who says "*I couldn't tell you the name of it, but it's the feeling that a place is really yours*" has just demonstrated band 7 vocabulary while visibly lacking a word.

0.2 Collocation, in one page

Words keep company, and every language chooses the company differently.

In English, rain is *heavy*, never *strong* — but wind is *strong*. You *make* a decision, *do* the shopping, *take* a photo, and there is no reason for any of it. These habits are called collocations, and your own language has them too, which is exactly the problem: you carry yours into English without hearing them, because in your head they sound normal.

A miscollocation costs more than a rare word earns, for three reasons. It is frequent — one wrong join per sentence adds up fast. It is visible — "*do a decision*" is understood instantly and noticed instantly. And it marks the sentence as assembled from parts rather than produced whole, which is the exact impression Lexical Resource exists to measure.

This is why the book pairs every phrase with its band-6 near-miss. The near-miss is not "bad English". It is English with one join failed, and seeing the join is what lets you fix it.

0.3 The performed word

Here is what the examiner hears several times a day: an answer moving along at band 6 — plain words, small errors, perfectly clear — and then, suddenly, "*plethora*".

The word arrives at the wrong speed. It sits in a sentence that was not built for it, next to words it would never naturally keep company with. It was learned from a list three weeks ago, and everyone in the room knows it. This is a performed word, and it does not raise the score. It lowers it, because knowing where a word belongs is part of what band 7 asks for, and a performed word is the loudest possible evidence of not knowing.

The working rule of this whole book: **if you have never said a word aloud in a sentence you built yourself, it is not yours yet.**

Nothing on these pages is worth memorising the week before the test.

The phrases here are common, small and usable precisely so that you can make them yours in time — by using them, about your own life, before the exam asks you to.

1.1 Cities and neighbourhoods

Where you live opens more speaking tests than any other topic, and city life — traffic, housing, green space — runs through the writing questions too. These eight phrases cover most of what the topic actually asks you to say.

a short commute

Spoken: "The best thing about the flat is honestly the short commute — I'm at my desk twenty minutes after I leave home."

At band 6: "It does not take long time to go to my office." — Two small joins fail at once: *a* long time, and *get to*, not *go to*. The idea survives; the phrasing marks it.

within walking distance

Spoken: "Pretty much everything I need is within walking distance, which I didn't appreciate until I lived somewhere it wasn't."

At band 6: "Many shops are near from my house and I can go there by foot." — *Near to* or just *near*; *on* foot, not *by* foot. Both are direct imports from other languages' joins.

the cost of living

Written: "Rents have risen faster than wages, and the cost of living now pushes young workers into the outer districts."

At band 6: "The life in my city is very expensive." — English prices the *cost of living*, not "the life". One noun choice separates the sentences.

a quiet residential area

Spoken: "It's a quiet residential area — mostly families, not much open after nine."

At band 6: "My neighbourhood is a calm zone for living." — *Calm* describes people and seas more naturally than districts, and *zone* belongs to planning documents, not conversation.

heavy traffic

Written: "Heavy traffic in the centre adds half an hour to even short journeys."

At band 6: "The traffic in my city is very crowded." — Streets are crowded; traffic is *heavy*. This is the classic collocation miss, and examiners meet it daily.

green space

Written: "The new development sets aside almost no green space, which residents noticed only after the trees were gone."

At band 6: "There are many natures in my city." — *Nature* has no plural, and cities have *green space* or *parks* rather than "natures".

well connected

Spoken: "The suburb itself is nothing special, but it's well connected — two metro lines and a night bus."

At band 6: "The transport of my area is very convenient to everywhere." — The natural subject is the *place*: an area is *well connected*; transport is *good* or *reliable*.

the area has changed a lot

Spoken: "The area has changed a lot in the last five years — half the old shops are gone."

At band 6: "My area became very different than before." — *Became different than before* is understood and flat; *has changed a lot* is what a fluent speaker reaches for, and the present perfect carries the "recently" for free.

Putting three to work

A Part 1 answer to "*Do you like the area where you live?*", using three phrases from this chapter:

I do, mostly. It's a quiet residential area, so there's not much nightlife, but everything I actually use — the market, the gym, a couple of cafés — is within walking distance. The area has changed a lot recently, to be fair, and not all of it is an improvement. But I'd still rather live there than anywhere closer to the centre.

Notice that nothing in the answer is rare. The phrases are doing quiet work: each one says in three words what the band 6 versions above need a whole clause to say, which is where the room for opinions and detail comes from.

1.2 Work and study

"Do you work or are you a student?" is the second question of most speaking tests, and education and employment supply half the essay questions in the writing test. These phrases carry both.

a demanding job

Spoken: "It's a demanding job — long days, and you're never really finished — but I still mostly enjoy it."

At band 6: "My job is very busy and very tiring." — A person is busy; a job is *demanding*. The band 6 version also spends two adjectives saying what one better one says alone.

meet a deadline

Written: "Students who work part-time often struggle to meet deadlines in term time."

At band 6: "It is difficult for them to finish the tasks before the time." — English *meets* deadlines. "Before the time" is the meaning of the word explained instead of the word.

gain experience

Written: "A year in a junior role lets graduates gain experience that no classroom can offer."

At band 6: "Young people can get many experiences from working." — *Experience* in this sense has no plural. *Many experiences* means separate adventures; *experience* means the accumulated skill the sentence intends.

job security

Written: "Older workers often value job security over a higher salary."

At band 6: "They prefer a safe and stable job than more money." — The idea has a name, *job security*, and using the name frees the sentence. Also *prefer... to*, never *than*.

work long hours

Spoken: "My father worked long hours when we were young, so evenings were quiet at home."

At band 6: "He was working many hours every day." — *Many hours* counts them; *long hours* is the set phrase that means the working day itself stretched.

take a year off

Spoken: "I took a year off before university, which nobody in my family thought was a good idea at the time."

At band 6: "I stopped my studies for one year before university." — *Stopped my studies* sounds permanent, like dropping out. *Take a year off* names the planned, temporary version.

keep up with

Spoken: "The course moves fast, and if you miss a week it's genuinely hard to keep up with the rest of the class."

At band 6: "It is hard to follow the lessons if you are absent." — *Follow* suggests understanding in the moment; *keep up with* names the race against the pace, which is the actual difficulty being described.

it opens doors

Spoken: "I chose the degree partly because it opens doors — you're not locked into one industry."

At band 6: "It gives many opportunities for my future." — Not wrong, just spent. *Gives many opportunities* appears in thousands of essays a week; *opens doors* is the phrase a fluent speaker actually says.

Putting three to work

A written paragraph for an essay about whether salary matters more than enjoyment at work, using three phrases from this chapter:

The case for choosing enjoyment weakens as responsibilities grow. A demanding job that a worker loves can still exhaust them if it means working long hours for pay that never quite covers the month. For most people the honest priority is job security: the confidence that the position will still exist next year. Enjoyment matters, but it is easier to enjoy work that is not keeping you awake about money.

Three phrases, no rare words, and the paragraph reads as argued rather than assembled — which is the whole trade this book is offering.

1.3 Free time and habits

Free time fills the friendly middle of Part 1 — hobbies, weekends, routines — and it is where answers most often turn into lists. These phrases are what developed answers about ordinary life are actually made of.

switch off

Spoken: "I run in the evenings, mostly because it's the only reliable way I've found to switch off after work."

At band 6: "It helps me to relax my mind after working." — *Relax my mind* is a direct translation from several languages; the English phrase for stopping work-thoughts is *switch off*, and it needs no object.

catch up with friends

Spoken: "Weekends are usually for catching up with friends — nothing organised, just coffee and talking."

At band 6: "I meet my friends and we talk about recent things in our lives." — The whole clause is the *meaning* of one phrase English already has. *Catch up with* is the name of that exact activity.

take up

Spoken: "I took up swimming last winter, which surprised everyone including me."

At band 6: "I started to learn swimming last winter." — *Started to learn* works, but *take up* is the verb English keeps specifically for beginning a hobby, and using it shows range at zero risk.

make time for

Spoken: "The weeks are full, but I try to make time for reading — even twenty minutes."

At band 6: "I try to find some time for reading." — *Find time* suggests luck; *make time* names the decision. The examiner hears the difference between things that happen to you and things you choose.

lose track of time

Spoken: "When I'm drawing I genuinely lose track of time — I've missed dinner more than once."

At band 6: "When I do it, I forget the time and continue many hours." — *Forget the time* is the idea explained; *lose track of time* is the phrase, and it is exactly the sort of small, natural idiom band 7 rewards.

get some fresh air

Spoken: "If I've been inside all day I'll walk to the river just to get some fresh air."

At band 6: "I go outside to breathe fresh air." — Nobody says *to breathe*; the set phrase is *get some fresh air*, and it carries the whole "I needed to leave the house" meaning by itself.

an early riser

Spoken: "I've become an early riser without meaning to — six o'clock, every day, weekends included."

At band 6: "I am the type of person who wakes up early every day." — The type of person who... is a long way around a thing English has a noun

for.

wind down

Spoken: "I stopped watching anything intense before bed — I need an hour to wind down or I sleep badly."

At band 6: "I try to make myself calm and relaxed before sleeping." —

Wind down is the specific verb for the slow evening version of relaxing.

Make myself calm describes effort; *wind down* describes the process the sentence actually means.

Putting three to work

A Part 1 answer to "*What do you usually do at the weekend?*", using three phrases from this chapter:

Nothing very exciting, honestly. Saturday is usually for catching up with friends — there's a café we've been going to for years. Sundays I keep quieter. I'll go out in the morning to get some fresh air, and then the afternoon is the one block of time I properly make time for reading. By the evening I feel human again.

Six sentences, three phrases, and no vocabulary above ordinary — but the answer sounds lived-in, which is precisely what "natural" means to the person scoring it.

1.4 Learning a skill



Cue cards love this territory — a skill you learned, a person who taught you, a time something was difficult — and Part 3 extends it into how people learn at all. These phrases are the working vocabulary of that whole conversation.

pick something up

Spoken: "I picked up the basics of editing in a weekend — the rest took about a year."

At band 6: "I learned the basic skills very fast." — Fine, but flat. *Pick up* is the specific verb for learning something casually or quickly, and it lets *learn* rest — repetition of *learn* is the usual failure in answers on this topic.

get the hang of it

Spoken: "Driving felt impossible for about a month, and then one week I just got the hang of it."

At band 6: "After some time I became familiar to it." — *Familiar with*, first; but the real miss is that English has a phrase for exactly this moment — the click where a skill starts working — and this is it. Speaking only; too casual for an essay.

it takes practice

Spoken: "Anyone can cook edible food fast. Cooking food people actually want takes practice."

At band 6: "You need to practise a lot of times to do it well." — *Practise a lot of times* counts occasions; *it takes practice* names the requirement, cleanly, with the thing being learned as the subject.

trial and error

Written: "Most practical skills are learned less from instruction than from trial and error."

At band 6: "People learn by trying and failing many times." — The explanation is accurate and eight words long; the phrase is three, and it is the standard name for the process in both registers.

a steep learning curve

Written: "New employees face a steep learning curve in their first month."

At band 6: "It is very difficult to learn everything at the beginning." — Use the phrase precisely or not at all: it means *hard and fast to learn at the start*, not simply "difficult". Used loosely it becomes the performed vocabulary Part 0 warns about.

build confidence

Written: "Small early successes build confidence faster than praise does."

At band 6: "Winning small things can increase my confident." — *Confident* is the adjective; the noun is *confidence*, and it is *built*, not increased, when the meaning is gradual.

learn from your mistakes

Spoken: "My aunt's whole teaching method was letting me learn from my mistakes — she'd watch me get it wrong and say nothing."

At band 6: "She let me take lessons from my failures." — *Take lessons from* is a translated join; English keeps the fixed phrase, and *mistakes* is the working word where *failures* sounds heavier than the situation.

rusty

Spoken: "I did French at school, but honestly it's rusty now — I understand more than I can say."

At band 6: "I forgot most of my French because I did not use it." — Accurate, but *rusty* says the same thing in one word and shows exactly the flexibility Lexical Resource is looking for: a plain metaphor, dead centre of natural English.

Putting three to work

Part of a written answer to a question about whether people learn better from teachers or from experience, using three phrases from this chapter:

Teachers matter most at the start, when a learner cannot yet see their own errors. After that point, experience does the heavier work. Most real skills are refined by trial and error, and what a learner gains from surviving early failures is not only technique: small recoveries build confidence in a way no lesson plan can. A good teacher, arguably, is someone who knows when to stop teaching and let that process begin — even when watching it takes patience.

The phrases disappear into the argument. That disappearing is the goal: vocabulary at band 7 is felt as fluency, not noticed as decoration.

1.5 Technology and the internet

Technology supplies a steady share of essay questions and nearly all of Part 3's "how has life changed" discussions. The vocabulary trap here is unusual: the topic sounds technical, so candidates reach for technical-sounding words — and the phrases that actually carry these conversations are small and ordinary.

spend time online

Spoken: "I probably spend two hours a day online without noticing any of them."

At band 6: "I waste many times in the internet every day." — *Online* and *on the internet*, never *in*; and *many times* means "on many occasions", which is a different claim from *a lot of time*.

keep in touch

Spoken: "Half my family lives abroad, so keeping in touch mostly means video calls on Sundays."

At band 6: "The internet helps me to keep contact with my family." — *Keep in touch with*, or *stay in contact with* — the band 6 version splices the two into a join English does not make.

look something up

Spoken: "If I don't know a word I just look it up on my phone, which my grandmother considers cheating."

At band 6: "I search about the word on the internet." — *Search about* is a translated preposition. English *looks things up*, or at most *searches for*

them.

a reliable connection

Written: "Remote work is only possible where a reliable connection can be taken for granted."

At band 6: "You need internet that is very strong and never stops." — Connections in English are *reliable*, *stable* or *fast* — not *strong*, which belongs to coffee and opinions.

screen time

Written: "Parents worry less about content than about sheer screen time."

At band 6: "Children spend too much hours using their phones and tablets." — *Too many* hours, first; but the real gain is the noun. *Screen time* names the modern worry in two words and lets the sentence talk about it as a thing.

a distraction

Spoken: "I leave the phone in another room when I work — it's a distraction even when it's silent."

At band 6: "My phone makes me distracted very easily." — Workable, but the noun form is stronger: calling the phone *a distraction* judges the object, not just the moment, which is usually the intended meaning.

face to face

Written: "Some conversations still need to happen face to face, and firing someone by email is widely felt to be cowardly."

At band 6: "It is better to talk with a real meeting." — *A real meeting* explains the idea; *face to face* is its name, and it works as both adverb and adjective (*a face-to-face conversation*).

rely on

Written: "Cities now rely on systems almost nobody in them understands."

At band 6: "People depend too much to technology." — *Depend on, rely on* — the preposition is fixed, and it is the single most common preposition error in technology essays.

Putting three to work

A Part 3 answer to "*Has technology changed how people maintain friendships?*", using three phrases from this chapter:

It's changed the shape of them, I'd say. Keeping in touch has never been easier — my closest friend lives in another country and we talk most weeks, which would have been letters a generation ago. But there's a cost hiding in the convenience: when you can rely on a group chat to feel connected, it's easy to let years pass without meeting face to face. The friendship survives; something in it thins.

An abstract question, answered almost entirely in one-syllable words — and the answer sounds more capable, not less, than one dressed in technical vocabulary.

1.6 Environment and transport

The writing test returns to this ground constantly — traffic, pollution, what governments should do about both. It is also where essays sound most alike, because everyone arrives with the same memorised phrases. These eight are chosen to be workable instead of impressive.

public transport

Written: "Investment in public transport pays for itself in road space alone."

At band 6: "The government should improve the public transports." — No plural, ever. One letter, and it appears in a phrase most environment essays cannot avoid, so the error repeats with every use.

cut emissions

Written: "The city cut emissions by a third in a decade, mostly by making driving expensive."

At band 6: "We must reduce the pollution gases from cars." — *The pollution gases* explains what *emissions* names. *Cut* is the working verb: *cut emissions, cut costs, cut waiting times* — a small verb with wide range.

a practical alternative

Written: "Buses only replace cars where they are a practical alternative — frequent, cheap and warm."

At band 6: "The government should give people another good choice instead of driving." — *Another good choice* is the meaning; *a practical*

alternative is the phrase an essay can build a sentence on, and *practical* is doing precise work: possible *in practice*, not just in theory.

rush hour

Spoken: "I've started leaving before seven just to miss rush hour."

At band 6: "The crowded time in the morning is very terrible." — English names it. Once it has a name, the sentence is free to say something about it instead of describing it from scratch.

air quality

Written: "Air quality in the capital now varies more between districts than between seasons."

At band 6: "The quality of air in my city is not good." — Not wrong — but the compound noun is the natural form, and it turns the topic into a subject the rest of the paragraph can measure, compare and improve.

environmentally friendly

Written: "Packaging described as environmentally friendly often only moves the damage somewhere less visible."

At band 6: "We should use products that are friendly to environment." — The fixed form is one word-pair, *environmentally friendly*, and the article is not optional: *friendly to the environment* if unpacked.

throw something away

Spoken: "Half of what we throw away could honestly be repaired."

At band 6: "People throw their old things to the rubbish." — English *throws things away* or *throws them out*; the destination is inside the verb. Everyday phrasal verbs like this are exactly the kind of idiomatic vocabulary the descriptors reward — the small working kind, not proverbs.

raise awareness

Written: "The campaign raised awareness but changed little behaviour, which is the usual order of events."

At band 6: "The government should make people know about this problem." — *Make people know* is the meaning spelled out. One honest warning: *raise awareness* appears in thousands of essays and earns nothing by itself — use it, as here, when the sentence goes on to say something about the awareness.

Putting three to work

A written paragraph for an essay about reducing car use in city centres, using three phrases from this chapter:

Charging drivers works only when the city offers a practical alternative. Where public transport is frequent and cheap, a congestion charge changes behaviour quickly; where it is not, the charge simply taxes people who have no other way in. The measure of success is not the money collected but the mornings themselves — shorter rush hours, and air quality that residents can feel improving rather than read about.

Compare this with the essay everyone writes — *"protect the environment for the next generation"* — and the difference is not ambition. It is that every noun here names something checkable.

1.7 Health and routine

Daily routine is Part 1's home ground, and health supplies a reliable stream of essay questions — diet, exercise, stress, whose job it is to fix them. The band 6 pattern here is naming everything through *healthy* and *unhealthy*; these phrases are the way out of that loop.

a balanced diet

Written: "Schools teach children about a balanced diet and then sell them chips at lunchtime."

At band 6: "People should eat healthy foods every day." — *Healthy foods* sorts food into two bins; *a balanced diet* names the actual advice, which is about proportion, not sorting.

get enough sleep

Spoken: "Everything in my life works better when I get enough sleep, and I still don't do it."

At band 6: "I try to sleep early and enough hours every night." — *Sleep enough hours* is a counted translation; English bundles the whole requirement into *get enough sleep*.

cut down on

Spoken: "I've cut down on sugar — not given it up, just pushed it to weekends."

At band 6: "I reduced to eat sugar in my daily life." — *Reduce* cannot take *to eat*. *Cut down on* is the everyday verb for consuming less of

something, and it leaves *give up* free to mean stopping entirely — a distinction the band 6 sentence cannot make.

stay active

Written: "Older people who stay active recover from illness measurably faster."

At band 6: "Old people should do sports to keep their body healthy." — *Do sports* is the teenager's version of the idea; *stay active* covers walking, gardening and swimming, which is what the sentence about older people actually means.

a check-up

Spoken: "I finally booked a check-up — nothing wrong, it had just been years."

At band 6: "I went to the hospital to control my health." — *Control* is the false friend here (several languages use it for "check"). The visit has a name, *a check-up*, and English *books* one.

manage stress

Written: "Employees are taught to manage stress as though the workload were weather."

At band 6: "It is important to control your stress feelings." — *Stress* needs no *feelings* after it, and the working verb is *manage* — which admits, honestly, that stress is not something anyone simply removes.

it becomes a habit

Spoken: "The first month of running was misery; after that it became a habit and stopped needing willpower."

At band 6: "After some time, it turned to my habit." — *Turned into*, if anything — but the natural phrasing is *become a habit*, and the sentence around it is where "routine" questions want you to go: what repetition does to effort.

skip a meal

Spoken: "When work gets busy I skip breakfast, which everyone tells me is the worst one to skip."

At band 6: "Sometimes I don't eat the breakfast because I have no time." — *Skip* is the verb English keeps for missing a meal, a class or a queue on purpose, and no article on *breakfast*.

Putting three to work

A Part 1 answer to "*Is your daily routine healthy, do you think?*", using three phrases from this chapter:

Partly. The exercise side is fine — I walk to work and I've managed to stay active even through winter. Food is weaker: when things get busy I skip meals, and then eat badly late in the evening, which is the opposite of a balanced diet. So it depends which half of the day you inspect, honestly.

The honest, slightly self-critical answer is not just more human — it is easier to phrase naturally, because it talks about specifics instead of

defending an ideal.

1.8 Money and possessions



Cue cards ask about things you own; Part 3 asks whether people own too much; essays ask about saving, spending and advertising. Money vocabulary at band 6 leans on *buy*, *expensive* and *important* — these phrases spread the weight.

put money aside

Spoken: "I try to put a little money aside every month, even when the month disagrees."

At band 6: "I save some money every month for my future." — *Save* is fine; the point is range. Answers about money repeat *save* three times in a minute, and *put aside* is the natural relief for it.

can't afford it

Spoken: "I'd love a bigger flat; I can't afford one, which simplifies the decision."

At band 6: "I don't have enough money to buy a bigger house." — Eleven words for four. *Afford* carries "not enough money to" inside it, and it takes a verb too: *can't afford to move*.

worth the price

Spoken: "The laptop was expensive, but four years on I'd say it was worth the price."

At band 6: "The laptop was expensive but it deserves its price." — *Deserve* wants a person; things are *worth* their price, or just *worth it* — one of the most usable two-word phrases in the language.

an impulse buy

Spoken: "The guitar was an impulse buy, and unlike most of them, it survived the first month."

At band 6: "I bought it suddenly without thinking too much before." — The clause is the definition; *an impulse buy* is the name. Naming it also lets you be funny about it, which Part 2 answers about possessions badly need.

sentimental value

Spoken: "The watch barely works, but it was my grandfather's, so it has sentimental value out of all relation to its price."

At band 6: "It is very important for me because of my memories." — The English phrase separates two kinds of worth — market and memory — and cue cards about possessions are almost always asking about the second one.

make ends meet

Written: "On the city's minimum wage, a family can make ends meet only by sharing housing."

At band 6: "It is very difficult for them to have enough money for living." — The fixed idiom is the natural register for essays about low pay — the small, working kind of idiom, not the proverb kind 3.4 warns against.

a waste of money

Spoken: "The gym membership was a waste of money — I went four times in a year."

At band 6: "I spent my money for nothing when I bought it." — *Spend money for nothing* is a translated shape; English judges the purchase with a noun: *a waste of money*, exactly parallel to *a waste of time*.

secondhand

Spoken: "Most of my furniture is secondhand, partly for the price and partly because I like things with a history."

At band 6: "I buy used things from other people to save money." — *Used things from other people* describes the category; *secondhand* is its adjective, and it works everywhere: a secondhand car, bookshop, coat.

Putting three to work

A written paragraph for an essay about whether advertising makes people buy things they do not need, using three phrases from this chapter:

Advertising's clearest success is the impulse buy: the purchase decided in the thirty seconds between seeing and paying. Most of what it sells this way fails the simplest test a buyer can apply — a month later, was it worth the price? — and the unworn clothes and unused gadgets answer quietly from the cupboard. For households already struggling to make ends meet, that engineered regret is not a private weakness. It is the product working as designed.

All eight phrases in this chapter are about money; the paragraph's force comes from spending them one at a time, in sentences that each finish their own thought.

Part 2 — Saying it twice

2.1 What paraphrase is for

The public marking criteria mention paraphrase by name, and most candidates misunderstand why.

It is not decoration. The test *forces* repetition on you. The essay question hands you its own words, and copying them into your introduction is the most visible move at band 6. The cue card does the same. And in every long answer you will need the same idea twice — once to state it, once to conclude it — with your own words from two minutes ago waiting to be repeated.

Paraphrase is how an answer escapes that loop. Restating an idea in different words is the most direct evidence of flexibility that Lexical Resource can get: it proves the first phrasing was a choice, not the only phrasing you had.

Book 1's model essays show the move once each: the opening states a position, the conclusion restates it — "*I do not believe it is the best solution*" becoming "*I would not call it the best one*". Same claim, different words. That is the entire skill, and the rest of this part is how to do it reliably.

2.2 The thesaurus trap

The wrong way to paraphrase is one word at a time, with a synonym list.

Dictionary neighbours are rarely true substitutes. Swap *important* for *matters* and the sentence survives: "Sleep is important" → "Sleep

matters." Swap *important* for *crucial* in a sentence about mild preference — "It is crucial for me to sit near a window" — and the sentence now claims a life-or-death stake it does not mean. The word was a synonym; the sentence stopped being true.

This is why thesaurus-paraphrase reads so strangely: each word is defensible and the total is wrong. It is also where performed words (0.3) usually enter — the synonym list ranked by impressiveness.

The working rule: paraphrase the idea at sentence level, not the word at word level. Ask what the sentence *claims*, then say that claim as if for the first time. The words change because the angle changed, which is the only reason words change naturally.

2.3 Four reliable moves

Four ways to restate a sentence, shown on the same base sentence:

Cars should be banned from the city centre.

Change the part of speech. Verbs become nouns, adjectives become verbs: "*A ban on cars in the city centre is overdue.*" The claim is untouched; the grammar around it reorganised itself, and new words came with the new shapes.

Change the point of view. Say it from the other end of the event: "*The city centre would be better off without cars.*" The banning authority has left the sentence; the place itself is now the subject.

Name the category instead of the item. Step one level up or down: "*Private vehicles have no place in the middle of a city.*" — or down:

"Nobody needs to drive past the cathedral." Both restate the position at a different zoom.

Say what it is not. State the claim by rejecting its opposite: *"Keeping the centre open to traffic serves nobody."* Negating the alternative is often the easiest honest paraphrase, and it adds argumentative pressure for free.

Four moves, one claim, no synonym list — and each version could open or close the same essay. Practise them on any opinion you hold: the skill transfers whole.

Part 3 — What keeps your vocabulary at band 6

Five habits. None of them are ignorance — every one is something a candidate *does*, usually because somewhere along the way it was taught as a way to score higher.

3.1 The performed word

Part 0.3 described it; here is the diagnostic.

Take any word you are planning to use in the test. Could you use it right now, out loud, in a sentence about your own life — your street, your job, your week — without preparing? If yes, it is yours. If no, it is a recitation, and under exam pressure it will arrive slightly wrong: the right word in the wrong register, keeping company with words it never keeps.

The fix is not learning the word harder. It is either using it for two weeks until it stops being a performance, or letting it go and trusting the plainer word — which was always the stronger choice of the two.

3.2 Repeating the question's words

The question says *"Some people believe that children should learn a musical instrument"* and the answer begins *"I agree that children should learn a musical instrument."* Nothing is wrong, and the examiner has already learned something true: given the most predictable moment in the test to show flexibility, this answer copied instead.

The first sentence you write or speak is where Part 2's four moves earn most. *"Music lessons give children something schools otherwise struggle*

to teach" answers the same question, takes one move (part of speech: *learn an instrument* → *music lessons*), and reads as a person thinking rather than a mirror reflecting.

Do not paraphrase frantically, swapping every noun. One visible restatement at the top is enough; copied key words later in the answer cost little. It is the opening echo that marks.

3.3 "Very" plus a weak adjective

Very good, very bad, very big, very important, very interesting, very tired.

Each of these has plainer, stronger alternatives the reader already knows: *excellent, enormous, essential, exhausted*. The problem is not that "very good" is an error — it is that reaching for *very* is the habit of not choosing. Six *verys* in a speaking answer is band 6 announcing itself, because every one was a fork where the stronger word was declined.

One honest caution in the other direction: replacing every *very* with an intensifier from a list (*extremely, incredibly, tremendously*) changes nothing — the habit survived, the costume changed. The fix is choosing the right adjective, not decorating the weak one.

3.4 Idioms from a list

"Every coin has two sides." "A double-edged sword." "Kill two birds with one stone." "Raining cats and dogs."

Examiners meet these daily, from candidates who met them weekly. They were learned as a group, from pages titled "idioms for IELTS", and they arrive the way all performed vocabulary arrives — at the wrong speed, in sentences built around them like display cases.

The strange truth: the descriptors do reward idiomatic language, and stock proverbs are not what the word means. Idiomatic English is the small, working kind this book is full of — *switch off*, *rusty*, *worth it*, *make ends meet* — phrases that disappear into a sentence instead of posing in one. A plain sentence outscores a stock proverb every time, and a small phrasal verb used naturally outscores both.

3.5 Translating from your own language

Most miscollocations in this book — *near from*, *by foot*, *control my health*, *depend to* — are not random. They are your language's joins, imported. Every language welds words together differently, and the welds are invisible from inside: *relax my mind* sounds perfect right up until English speakers never say it.

This book cannot know your language, so it cannot list your imports. But you can. Every time this book's band-6 sentence made you think "*but that sounds fine*" — that is an import, found. Keep a two-column list: the join your language makes, the join English makes. Ten entries of that list, collected from your own errors, are worth more than any vocabulary list in this book or anywhere else, because nobody else's list is aimed at you.

That list is also the honest answer to "how do I fix my vocabulary in the last month": not by adding words, but by finding the ten joins you personally import, and rewelding them.

Part 4 — Practice, and the last week

4.1 The re-entry test

Six original prompts, sending you back through the topics rather than at new ones. No model answers — you have seen sixty-four phrases already put to work; the point now is putting some to work yourself.

1. Answer out loud: "*What's your neighbourhood like?*" Try to use at least one phrase from 1.1.
2. Write two sentences about a job you would not want, using *demanding* and one other phrase from 1.2.
3. Answer out loud: "*How do you usually spend a free evening?*" Use one phrase from 1.3.
4. Write one sentence describing a skill you are bad at, using *rusty* or *a steep learning curve*.
5. Answer out loud: "*Do you think people spend too much time on their phones?*" Use one phrase from 1.5 and one paraphrase move from Part 2.
6. Write two sentences about a possession that matters to you, using *sentimental value*.

Check yourself against one thing only: did the phrase sound like part of the sentence, or did it sound placed? If it sounds placed, it is not ready yet — that is fine, and worth knowing now rather than in the exam room.

4.2 The last seven days

If your test is next week, this is what is worth doing with what is in this book.

Worth doing

- **Use the phrases you already marked**, not new ones. Say them in sentences about today — what you did, what you noticed, what annoyed you. Ten minutes a day is enough.
- **Keep the two-column list from 3.5 open** and add to it whenever a band-6 sentence in this book made you think "but that sounds fine to me." That reaction is the whole diagnosis.
- **Reread Part 2 once.** Paraphrasing the question in your first sentence is the single highest- value habit in this book, and it is a habit, not a fact to memorise.

Not worth doing

- **Learning new phrases from this book or anywhere else this week.** A phrase used for the first time under exam pressure is a performed word (0.3), whatever list it came from, including this one.
- **Building a longer list.** If you have marked more than fifteen or twenty phrases across every chapter, you have more than you can make natural in a week. Narrow it instead of growing it.
- **Worrying about sounding advanced.** Every example sentence in this book is ordinary. The gap between band 6 and band 7 was never about sounding advanced — it was about the joins.

The end

You now know why "very good" costs you more than it seems to, what a performed word sounds like from the examiner's side, and sixty-four phrases with their band-6 near-misses named specifically enough to fix.

That is genuinely most of it. The rest is using them — out loud, in sentences about your own life, until they stop feeling borrowed.

Good luck with the test.

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