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IELTS

BAND 9

GENERAL

TRAINING

TASK ONE

CAMBRIDGE IELTS

CONSULTANTS

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GET IELTS BAND 9

IN GENERAL TRAINING WRITING TASK 1

Your guide to writing
Band 9 letters

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Introduction from the authors

The IELTS General Training (GT) Writing Test is different from the IELTS Academic Writing Test, and so GT candidates need to do a different type of preparation.

The GT test is in two parts. In GT Part1, you write a letter in a personal, formal or semi-formal style. You must write at least 150 words, and 20 minutes is the recommended time for this.

In GT Part 2, you have to write an essay in a formal style, roughly similar to the IELTS Academic Writing Test Part 2. You must write at least 250 words, and 40 minutes is the recommended time for this.

This book will help you with the GT Part 1 letter.

Although writing a short letter may seem quite simple, the test requires you to think very carefully about the recipient (the person reading the letter) the content (the ideas and details you create) and the style of the writing.

If you can get these three things right and you answer the task fully, you should get a high score, even if there are some mistakes in your English. On the other hand, if the IELTS examiner thinks you are confused about the recipient and the style, and if your content

does not answer the task properly, you will get a low score – even if your English is quite good.

This book shows you a three-step system for analysing the Task and making sure that you create the best possible letter for the situation in your particular test. It has twelve example Tasks, with guidance on how to use our system, plus twelve Band 9 model essays with explanations of how the candidate achieved such a high score.

If you need a dictionary while reading, we recommend the free [*Cambridge Dictionaries Online*](#) from Cambridge University Press.

Don't just trust to luck in your IELTS exam – it's too important.
The key is expert advice!

Best Wishes,
Jessica Alperne & Peter Swires
Cambridge IELTS Consultants

About GT Writing Part 1: How to create your letter

The purpose of Part 1 of the GT test is to check that you can communicate in an appropriate and effective way, in writing a letter or email. To do this, you must spend a few minutes in the exam reading the Task and deciding on three points:

The imaginary **recipient** of the letter

The correct **style** to use

The **content** of the letter

Let's explain this:

Recipient The imaginary **recipient** (the person who receives and reads it) may be a friend, a stranger, or a social or professional contact. 'Imaginary' means it exists only in imagination; don't base your answer on a real person that you know.

Style Depending on this, the letter may need to be in a personal **style**, or a formal **style**. Occasionally, a Task may require a semi-formal **style**, which we also explain in this book.

Content The task will ask you to write a letter or email in which the **content** ideas are a mix of:

Complaining about something

Requesting something

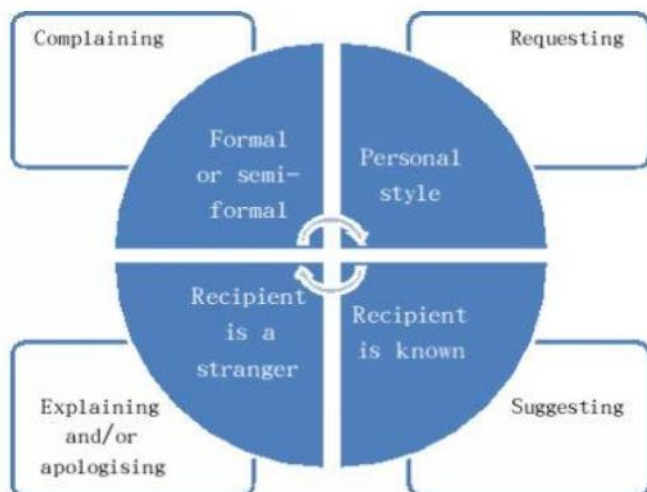
Explaining and/or **apologising** about something

Suggesting something

(There will be a combination of these ideas, not just one.)

Depending on what the task instruction is, you then need to decide whether to write your letter or email in a formal, semi-formal or personal **style**, and create the appropriate **content** ideas for this imaginary **recipient**.

It may help to think about it like this:



Remember, you need to decide on the **recipient** of the letter, the **style** and the **content**. This means you need to choose from the white boxes (the combination of the four possible types of **content**) and from the blue quarters of the circle (the **recipient** and the **style**) and then organise your letter based on this choice.

To demonstrate this, here is an example Task:

Example Task 1

You are living in a University residence, and you have a problem with the high levels of noise from a new campus restaurant which is open until midnight. Write a letter to the governor of the University. In your letter,

*Complain about the situation
Say why this is a problem
And propose ways to reduce the noise*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Before we look at the model letter for this task, ask yourself:

Recipient: Is the imaginary **recipient** of this a letter a person you know personally, or someone you don't know? Is this person a friend, a stranger or a professional contact?

Style: Therefore, should it be in a personal or formal **style**?
Because of the **style**, how should you complete the 'Dear -----' part?

Content: Why are you writing the letter? Which combination of the four possible **content** ideas is it asking you to create (complaining, requesting, explaining/apologising, suggesting)?

The answers to these questions are:

Recipient: In this imaginary situation, the **recipient** is a person you probably don't know. In reality, you would certainly know the Governor's name, but it's very unlikely that you would know them personally, although they might be a professional contact.

Style: Because of this, the letter should be in a formal **style**. The Governor may be a contact, but is not a friend; he/she is probably older than you, and certainly higher in authority. Because this is a formal **style** letter, and you know the name of the **recipient**, you should begin 'Dear Mr Smith' or 'Dear Mrs Smith' or 'Dear Ms Smith.'

In this situation, you would certainly not begin 'Dear Sir or Madam,' because it would be rude *not* to know the Governor's surname.

Content: The Task is asking you to create **content** for: complaining, explaining and suggesting. (Complaining about the noise, explaining the problem, and suggesting ways to reduce it.)

It is *not* asking you to apologise for anything, or to request anything.

That was an example of how you should think about **recipient**, **style** and **content** in GT Task 1 *before* you start writing. You should do this in two or three minutes when you are in the exam.

There are three very important points to highlight at this stage:

1. Only create **content** that the Task asks you to create!

In this example Task, you shouldn't try to *request* more information (for example, about noise regulations), or *apologise* for contacting the Governor. The IELTS examiner will think you have not understood or analysed the task, and you will lose marks.

2. Remember that the instructions in the exam will not say directly 'use a personal or formal **style**.' You need to decide this, based on the given situation and the **recipient**.

3. Also, the instructions may not use the exact **content** words 'complaining, requesting, explaining/apologising, suggesting.' For example, they may say 'protesting about, asking for, describing/saying sorry, proposing' or use other synonyms. You need to think about this as you read the Task. Ask yourself, 'Why am I writing this letter? What combination of **content** do I need to create?'

This book will explain all of these points in more detail, with examples to help you. But now, let's look at the Band 9 model letter for this Task about the 'campus noise problem.'

Model letter 1: Key principles in a formal style letter (complaining, explaining, suggesting)

Example Task 1

You are living in a University residence, and you have a problem with the high levels of noise from a new campus restaurant which is open late at night. Write a letter to the governor of the University. In your letter,

*Complain about the situation
Say why this is a problem
And propose ways to reduce the noise*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Band 9 model letter 1

Dear Mr Smith,

I am writing regarding the amount of noise coming from the new canteen which has just opened near my University residence. Although I am pleased that we have this facility, the restaurant remains open up to midnight each night, and as a result there is considerable talking, shouting and the sound of motorbikes continuing until about 12.30 each night.

This causes me and my neighbours in the residence a serious problem, because at that time we are either trying to sleep, or in some cases trying to study in our bedrooms. In both cases, the noise and commotion disturbs us, making us tired in the mornings or affecting the progress of our studies. I am sure you will appreciate that this is a very worrying situation for us all.

I would like to suggest that the campus authorities restrict the canteen's opening to 11pm at the latest on weekdays, leaving it at midnight during the weekend. I propose that we also

put up some signs reminding users to be considerate and to keep their noise to an absolute minimum. These are simple steps which would make us all very grateful indeed.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Kind Regards,

Claudia Maggioni

(206 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient: The candidate has understood that the **recipient** is a more senior person. She has used a greeting ('Dear Mr Smith') and an ending ('Kind Regards') which are appropriate and realistic for this **recipient**.

Style: The English used is formal in **style**, with formal words such as 'regarding, remains, considerable, commotion, appreciate, restrict.' There are no contractions (eg 'don't, can't' etc) and no informal phrases (eg 'drives me crazy' or 'keeps me up all night.')

The candidate has used some classic formal phrases to make her point, especially:

'I am writing regarding ...'

'I am sure you will appreciate that ...'

'May I suggest that ...'

'Thank you for your attention to this important matter.'

The candidate has written in a calm and professional way, and has also made a positive comment ('Although I am pleased that we have this facility ...') which is a feature of formal writing in English.

Content: This candidate has answered all the points in the task; she has complained about the noise, explained why it's a problem, and suggested some ways to reduce it.

The three **content** ideas are separated into three paragraphs, making it clear for the examiner to see the three ideas at work.

The candidate has invented *a few* details of the situation (the motorbikes, the students trying to sleep or study); these details are realistic, relevant and not too complicated or dramatic.

In the 'suggesting' paragraph, the candidate's suggestions are realistic (meaning they could be agreed in real life.)

The letter is over 150 words, but not excessively. Around 200 to 220 words is the ideal length for an IELTS GT letter.

Summary of model letter 1

Although this is only our first model letter, we have identified some of the most important points about writing a Band 9 IELTS GT formal **style** letter:

Decide on the **recipient**, the **style** and the combination of different **content** for your Task, and organise your letter on this basis. Use our system of the white boxes and the blue circle to help you decide.

Use a simple but formal **style** greeting and ending (model letter 3 in this book has more information about this.)

Use formal **style** language, vocabulary and phrases. This book has many examples of formal letters to help you with this. As a general rule, don't use phrasal verbs (eg 'to put up, to give in, to hand out' etc); try to use Latin-based words instead ('to increase, to submit, to distribute' etc.)

Only use contractions in a personal letter, never in a formal letter.

Write in a calm way, with no humour or drama. It is surprising how many IELTS GT candidates try to make jokes in formal letters; you will always lose marks for this.

In formal letters, don't use exclamation marks (!) even if you might do this in other languages. In English, this would be confusing for the recipient. You can use exclamation marks (once only) in personal letters, as we explain in the next section in this book.

If the letter is a complaint, try to make a positive comment too, in addition to all the negatives. This makes the letter more balanced and realistic.

It is very important to separate your **content** ideas into clear paragraphs so that the examiner can see them immediately. The best way to do this is to leave a one line gap on the paper between the paragraphs, as in our model letter above.

Invent some realistic and relevant **content** details of the situation; this means things which would be possible in real life, without lots of specific detail.

Remember, this was an example of a formal **style** letter. Our next example is about a letter for a different type of situation.

Model letter 2: Key principles in a personal style letter (requesting, explaining, proposing)

Example Task 2

You are living in a city in a foreign country, and a friend from your home country is soon coming to visit you for several days. Write an email to your friend,

*asking him or her to bring some things from home which you need
saying why you need them
making arrangements to meet*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Before you read the explanation and model letter, ask yourself the same questions as before:

Is the **recipient** of this a letter a person you know personally, or someone you don't know?
Is this person a friend?

Therefore, should it be in a personal or formal **style**?
How should you complete the 'Dear -----' part?

Which of the four **content** ideas is it asking you to use (complaining, requesting, explaining/apologising, suggesting)?

Explanation of the Task

Recipient The imaginary recipient is obviously a friend.

Style The style should be personal, so you can use contractions ('don't' etc), short words, phrasal verbs and friendly, personal phrases. In a personal letter, begin with 'Dear + the friend's first name only.' Never write their first name + surname, and never write 'Dear friend.'

Content The task is asking you for: requesting, explaining and suggesting (ask for the things you need, explain why you need them, suggest a meeting time/place.)

Band 9 model letter 2

Dear Peter,

I'm so glad that you're coming to Montreal next week, as it seems ages since we last saw each other. I hope your family and girlfriend are all well. I actually have a favour to ask you, and I hope you don't mind. The fact is that I need a few things from my parents' house, and I'd be so grateful if you could bring them along in your suitcase.

The first thing is the book of maths calculations which I had at high school – don't worry, it's only a small book. I need this because it has all the material I studied for my exams, and I can't get another copy here in any of the bookshops or on the Internet. The second thing is a packet of those biscuits from the bakery in my old street. I've told everyone here how delicious they are, and my new friends are very keen to try them!

I do hope that is manageable for you, as it won't take up much space at all. In the meantime, I'm very excited about seeing you again at the airport on Monday at midday. I'll be in the arrivals hall, wearing my blue jacket.

I can't wait to see you then.

All the best,

Simon

(213 words)

Why is this a band 9 letter?

Recipient The candidate has addressed the letter and finished it in a suitable way, with a friendly phrase and 'All the best' at the end + his first name only. He refers to the fact that he knows the recipient well and has not seen him for some time, which people often do in letters to friends.

Style The candidate has used a personal style, with contractions and short, simple words in some cases (eg 'seems ages/small/ thing/keen to try/my old street.') This vocabulary works well here, but would not be suitable in a formal letter.

Phrasal verbs are used naturally ('Bring them along/take up space') instead of Latin-based verbs (the Latin, formal versions would be 'convey them/occupy space.')

The candidate has used typical personal structures in a realistic way ('I'm so glad/I'm so grateful/I do hope/I'm very excited') to show his feelings.

Where the candidate uses formal words (eg 'material, delicious, excited') this is done because certain formal words are often used like this, even in personal letters.

The candidate uses one exclamation mark ('very keen to try them!') to make a small joke. It is fine to use one such mark in a personal letter. Don't use more than one, because that would be annoying to the recipient.

Content The candidate has separated the three content ideas into three clear paragraphs. He has invented some details of the imaginary situation (the books, biscuits, the blue jacket) which are convincing and seem like real life. He expresses his request with consideration to the possible inconvenience for his friend, and he thanks the friend for the help.

The length of the letter (211 words) is the ideal length for a Task 1 letter.

Summary of model letter 2

We have now identified some of the most important points in writing a Band 9 IELTS GT personal letter:

Start with Dear + first name only.

Conclude with a friendly, personal sentence and 'All the best' + your first name.

Use contractions, phrasal verbs and informal vocabulary.

Some of the principles are also the same as for a GT formal letter:

Separate the content ideas into clear paragraphs or sections.

Invent some relevant, realistic details, but keep this clear and brief.

Our next two model letters give you more advice about beginning and ending your letters in a formal and also a personal style.

Model letter 3: Formal style greetings & endings; complaining, explaining, requesting

Example Task 3

You have received a bill from a mobile phone (or cell phone) company for international call charges relating to a time when you did not use your phone for international calls.

Write a letter to the company,

complaining about this

*giving your reasons
asking for the bill to be changed*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Before you read the explanation and model letter, ask yourself the questions about recipient, style and content of this task.

Explanation of the Task

Recipient This is a person that the writer does not know and has not met. It is a formal, professional situation.

Style The style will be formal, emphasising the fact that the writer is a customer and has a complaint. It is important to avoid humour or drama in letters like this.

Content The Task asks for: complaining (about the bill), explaining (why the bill is wrong), and requesting (a revised bill.) In IELTS GT letters, don't invent too many complicated details about the situation, even if you know a lot about the topic (eg all the different call rates and time zones etc.) Try to keep the details quite simple.

Band 9 model letter 3

Dear Sir or Madam,

I have been a satisfied customer for several years, but I am writing regarding the cell phone bill I received on 17th March 2015, which includes a total of \$900 for international call charges. In fact, these charges are completely unjustified, for the following reason.

At no time have I used this phone to make international calls, either to my home country or to any other country. I used the phone purely for local calls and for calls to government departments in London, which are national calls. I have checked my call summary, and there is no record of any international connections. As you see, there is no possible reason for me to be charged for international calls, and this is easily confirmed by my phone records.

I therefore request that you withdraw these charges and change my bill accordingly. I also ask you to confirm to me in writing that this has been actioned, by sending a copy of the revised bill to me at this address.

I look forward to receiving your confirmation that all is in order.

Kind Regards,

Mandeep Singh

(188 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient

Formal greetings (the 'Dear -----' part)

In formal letters (letters to people you don't know, or people in authority) you will *usually* begin with 'Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Smith.' Choose which you prefer from 'Mr/Mrs/ Ms' – the examiner will not mind which one.

'Ms' is used for women to avoid saying either 'Mrs' or 'Miss.' These days, the word 'Miss' is not normally used to address adult women in writing.

Remember to put a comma (,) after 'Smith' like this:

Dear Mr Smith,

If you wish, you can change the name 'Smith' for another surname, but make this a very simple one! Use an *English* surname, because this shows the examiner that you are thinking in an English-speaking context.

Don't waste time thinking of an imaginary surname – just use 'Smith' (or the other English surname you prefer) for all your formal letters in Tasks where in reality you would know the person's name.

In IELTS GT, you will *usually* use 'Dear + Mr/Mrs/Ms + surname' for formal letters. It is rare to begin a letter in English with 'Dear Sir or Madam.'

However, this is one Task where you *might* say 'Dear Sir or Madam.' If the Task tells you to write to a large organisation, ask yourself if in real life you might know the name of the person you are writing to. In this example, it's possible that in reality you might not know the name of the 'complaints department manager' or similar; therefore, it's acceptable to write 'Dear Sir or Madam.' Remember, though, that such Tasks are less common than tasks where you *would* know the person's name, so normally you will use 'Mr/Mrs/Ms Smith.'

Remember to put a comma (,) after 'Madam' like this:

Dear Sir or Madam,

Remember that the words 'Mr/Mrs/Ms/Sir/Madam' all begin with a capital letter when used in a letter greeting.

Formal endings (the 'goodbye' part)

In a formal letter, try to finish your letter with two things.

First, a 'call to action' sentence which tells the reader politely what you want them to do. The easiest way to do this is to write 'I look forward to + ing or + noun.' For example:

'I look forward to receiving your confirmation/to receiving a refund/to learning of your proposal.'

Or with a noun instead of '+ ing':

'I look forward to your confirmation/to a refund/to your proposal.'

Try to use the '+ ing' form if possible, because it will impress the examiner more.

Try not to write 'I look forward to hearing from you.' This is because it looks like a memorised phrase, and the examiner may not appreciate this. Examiners don't like to see phrases which are clichés or possibly memorised. See the last section of this book ('10 Things Not To Do') for more advice on what an IELTS examiner does NOT like to see in a GT letter!

Other ways to write a classic 'call to action' sentence are:

'I would appreciate your reply with a confirmation/a refund/ a proposal as I have requested.'

'Please respond as soon as possible, outlining your confirmation/your refund/ your proposal in this matter.'

'As you will appreciate, this is an urgent matter, and I look forward to your prompt reply.'

'Thank you for your help, and I await the information requested with interest.'

After your 'call to action' sentence, you only need to write 'Kind Regards' and your first name + surname.

It is possible that your English teacher taught you to use phrases such as 'Yours Faithfully' (for 'Dear Sir or Madam' letters) and 'Yours Sincerely' (for 'Dear Mr Smith' letters.) It is fine to do this, but it's not necessary! Both types of letter can be concluded with 'Kind Regards.'

Remember to put a comma after 'Regards' like this:

Kind Regards,

Mandeep Singh

Use your *real* first name + surname in the way it appears on your IELTS candidate paper. Don't use an imaginary name at the end, because this makes the letter unrealistic.

Don't put a full stop (.) after your name, because this is not a sentence.

Don't put any other titles or information about yourself with your name; for example, don't write:

'Mr Mandeep Singh'

Or

'Mandeep Singh (customer since 2012)'

Or

'Your loyal customer, Mandeep Singh'

This is because it is not normal to add such information at the end when writing in English; it is a good idea to tell them that you have been a customer since 2012, but put this in the main letter!

Content In this letter, the candidate has used elements which are clear to understand, without using too much detail. The three content ideas are organised in three clear sections. The language used is quite strong (eg 'I therefore request') but it is always polite and professional.

The candidate shows that he can use the verb 'appreciate' in two ways:

'I would appreciate your reply' = I want you to reply to me

'As you will appreciate, this is ...' = I am sure you can understand that this is ...

Overall, this is an excellent example of how to write a formal letter of complaint in English.

Model letter 4: Personal style greetings & endings; explaining, suggesting, requesting

Example Task 4

A friend has told you that he or she feels lonely in their new city away from their family. Write to your friend, and

Explain why people can feel this way

Give some ideas on how to solve the problem

Ask your friend to contact you and tell you if this works

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient This is a friend that you know well; you have a close relationship.

Style The style will be personal, with emphasis on the possibility of the friend being upset or depressed.

Content The task is asking for explaining (why people feel like this), suggesting (things to improve the situation), requesting (that your friend keeps in touch.)

Band 9 model letter 4

Dear Petra,

I am so sorry to hear that you are feeling rather isolated in your new home, especially as you have always been such an outgoing person!

I think that people tend to feel lonely because they don't have enough opportunities to meet new friends. This leads to them staying at home more, so that the situation becomes even worse.

If I were you, I would join some of the clubs and societies which exist at your college, for example the ballroom dancing club – because I know how much you love dancing. This means you will meet people with similar interests and abilities, and you can share the enjoyment of ballroom. I would also try to use the Internet more, to meet people safely online and see if they are local to you in your new city. You have to be very careful, of course, but if you use Internet sites as they are intended I'm sure you will find some new friends - not necessarily of the romantic type!

Please do keep in touch, and let me know how you get on with these suggestions. If you let me know how this goes, I can try to think of other ways to help you in your situation at the moment.

Take care and do stay in touch.

All the best,

Anjelika

(222 words)

Why is this a band 9 letter?

Recipient The letter has a greeting and an ending which are suitable for personal letters to friends.

At the end of a personal letter, put a short, friendly phrase (eg 'Take care and do stay in touch') followed by a space and then 'All the best' + your first name only. Don't put your family name or phrases such as 'Your old friend Anjelika' etc.

Other examples of the short, friendly phrases to use before 'All the best' at the end are:

'I'll be thinking of you and the family.'

'Hope to hear from you soon with lots of news.'

'See you on Wednesday!'

'Do keep in touch, you know I like hearing from you.'

'Best wishes from everyone here.'

'Take care, and wrap up warm if it's cold.'

'I must go now, because I've got so much packing to do.'

Remember to put a comma (,) at the end of 'All the best,' and don't put a full stop (.) after your name.

It's possible that your English teacher has shown you how to write 'PS' at the end of a personal letter to add some extra information. For example:

*See you soon,
Peter*

PS My flight arrives at midnight, so I'll take a taxi.

In reality, people rarely do this today. You should only do this in IELTS personal letters if you think you have not written 150 words, and you want to add some more words. Remember, you cannot use 'PS' in a formal letter.

Style This candidate uses some good personal phrases for giving advice:

'If I were you, I would join . . . I would also try to . . .'

Other ways to give personal advice are:

'Maybe you could go . . .'

'Have you tried to go . . .'

'You could always go . . .'

'It might be a good idea to go . . .'

Try to use these phrases, and not just 'You should go . . .' because they are more complex. Saying 'I suggest that you go . . .' is too formal for a personal letter; it would be better to use this phrase in a formal letter for the 'suggesting' content ideas.

Content The candidate has separated the three content parts into three sections. The 'suggesting' part is much longer than the other two, but in reality this would probably be the case. Your three sections don't have to be *exactly* the same length; try to imagine what the letter would be like in reality.

The candidate uses an exclamation mark (!) at the beginning; this seems to be an attempt to 'cheer up' the recipient, and so this is effective.

Considering that the recipient is probably feeling upset, the candidate expresses the 'requesting' part with sensitivity:

'Please do keep in touch . . . If you let me know . . . I can try to . . .'

Using the 'zero conditional' (If + present simple tense + can) like this is a good way to make requests or suggestions in a personal letter. Other examples are:

'If you leave the things at my house, I can take them with me.'

'If you let me know the arrival time, I can meet you in my car.'

You could also use the 'first conditional' (If + present tense + will) for this:

'If you send out the party invitations, I'll bring all the food.'

'If you bring your essay over, I'll read it and try to help.'

The IELTS examiner will be impressed to see requests and suggestions made in this way for personal letters. Our next letter shows you other ways of making personal suggestions, in a situation where the recipient is probably happier and less sensitive.

Model letter 5: Explaining, suggesting (personal style)

Example Task 5

A friend who is planning to visit you has asked you to describe the most interesting and enjoyable things to do in the community where you currently live. Write an email to your friend, telling them about these things. In your email,

*Say what these things are
Say why they are interesting/enjoyable
Suggest what you can do together*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient If the task tells you to write to a friend, ask yourself what mood the friend would be in: are they upset (as in our previous letter) or excited (as in this situation)? This will make a difference to the way you write the letter. If the friend is probably excited, and you are planning things together, you can be more direct and less sensitive.

Style The letter will be personal and cheerful.

Content The task is asking you for explaining (what the things are and why they are enjoyable) and also suggesting (things to do when the friend visits.)

Band 9 model letter 5

Dear Nikolai,

Thanks for your email last week, and I'm so happy that you are arriving next weekend.

You asked about the interesting things to do around here. Well, firstly, we have the downtown area, which has many old cafés and bars, and some sights such as the statues and the colonial houses. Apart from that, there is the park, which has a theatre, more eating places, and an outdoor music venue. All in all, these places offer a lot of variety, with options for dining, sightseeing and good quality live entertainment, and all within an easy walk of the central area where I live.

Here is an idea. When you get here, let's have an early night so that you get over the jet lag, and then go to the downtown area in the morning. We can have a traditional breakfast at one of the old cafés, and see some of the sights. Then we can see a show at the theatre, have dinner in the park if it's sunny, and finally listen to the music in the outdoor arena. I think we might need another early night after such a long day!

Please get in touch before the weekend just to let me know if that sounds ok, and also your flight number.

All the best,

Mikhail

(219 words)

Why is this a band 9 letter?

Recipient The letter is addressed and concluded in a suitable way for a personal letter, and the candidate shows that he has a good relationship with the recipient ('I'm so happy that you are arriving...') The short, friendly phrase at the end fits naturally with the ideas in the letter.

Style The personal style uses informal structures and vocabulary:

'Thanks/well/apart from that/here is an idea/let's'

(The equivalent phrases for a formal letter would be: 'Thank you/therefore/In addition/if I may suggest/I suggest that we')

Some of the vocabulary is more formal ('colonial/venue/dining/traditional') but in reality these would be used in this situation in a personal letter. The writer also shows that he can use informal words to balance these ('downtown, eating places, an easy walk, an early night, see the sights') so the letter is convincing in its style.

'Here is an idea' is a good way to make a suggestion to a friend that you know well.

Content The three content paragraphs are different sizes, and the middle paragraph is a bit too short, but it does explain why the amenities are interesting.

The candidate avoids the danger of the 'suggesting' paragraph becoming just a list, by using 'When/then/finally/I think we might need,' which makes it read like a logical sequence or narrative, not just a list of things in a sequence.

The details which the candidate has invented are easy to understand, and don't rely on local knowledge to be clear.

If a task tells you to describe a place, always use names for streets, buildings etc *in English*. For example, don't write 'There is an excellent theatre called the Cinco de Mayo' even if you are thinking of a place in Spanish which has that name. Write '. . . called the Fifth of May Theatre' and so on.

This is because the IELTS examiners do not like to see any language apart from English in Task 1 or Task 2, even for festivals, buildings, ceremonies etc, so you should always translate them into English.

If there is no direct translation, just create a suitable English name, for example 'There is a big festival here called the National Spring Festival.'

Model letter 6: Explaining, requesting (semi-formal style)

Example Task 6

You wish to apply for a new college course, but you are unsure about the details of cost, duration and subjects posted on the college website. Write an email to the relevant person in admissions at the college, asking them to clarify these points for you. In this email,

*Say what your interest is
Explain why the website is unclear
Request the information that you need*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient This is a letter to a person you do not know; however, in reality, you would probably know their name from the website, and this Task says 'the relevant person,' so it cannot be 'Dear Sir or Madam.'

Style Occasionally, a task will give you a situation which is between formal and personal, which the examiners call 'semi-formal.' This will usually be to a person you do not know well, but there is no need to be highly formal.

In this situation, the recipient would be familiar with getting many queries such as this; you are not complaining or insisting on a refund or a change; the recipient is probably not senior to you in age or authority. For these reasons, you can use a slightly less formal style than we saw in Model letters 1 and 3 in this book.

In the exam, think about these points, to decide if the Task may be asking for a semi-formal letter; if you are not sure, write it in a formal style – that's better than writing in a style which is too personal!

Remember that formal and personal letter tasks are more common than semi-formal letter tasks.

Content The Task asks for explaining (your interest and the problems with the website) and requesting (the information you still need.)

Band 9 model letter 6

Dear Mr Smith,

I'm interested in the photography course this year, and I have seen your name on the college website as the contact for admission queries. I have several questions for you, and I hope you can help.

Firstly, regarding the cost of the course, is the fee of \$99 per month or for the whole course? Is it possible to pay in monthly instalments, or is the fee paid in full up front? The website says that 'other payment methods are possible,' but there is no explanation.

Secondly, can you tell me what the exact dates of the course are? Your website says 'Summer to Autumn,' but I can't see any specific dates relating to this. I would be grateful for the precise dates, including when I need to pay for the course and buy the books and so on.

Finally, I'd appreciate some information about the course content itself, including details of the equipment to be used and the wording of the certificate I will receive at the end. The website says that I should contact you for this.

Thank you for your help, and I look forward to receiving the information requested.

Kind Regards,

Aftab Iqbal

(200 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient The letter is addressed and concluded in a suitable formal style, because this person is a stranger; however, the content is written in a semi-formal way, for the reasons explained above.

Style The style is a mix of formal and personal.

The formal elements are:

The greeting and ending, with a formal 'call to action.'

Using 'firstly/secondly/finally' to introduce the paragraphs.

Using an indirect question ('Can you tell me . . .') to make a request.

Using 'I would be grateful for' and 'I'd appreciate' to make a request (In a purely formal letter, this would be 'I would appreciate.')

Using formal words including 'monthly instalment/specific/course content/wording.'

You can use all of these elements in a formal letter.

The personal elements are:

Using a small number of contractions ('I'm interested/I'd appreciate') to make the communication less strong and more friendly.

Using direct questions ('is the fee . . ./is it possible . . .') to request information.

Using the simple word 'help' rather than 'assistance' or 'attention.'

Using 'and so on' instead of 'etc' or 'and other such matters' or similar.

You can use all of these elements in a personal letter.

When the two styles are mixed in this way, the recipient sees that the letter is serious and professional, but also that the writer is trying to be friendly and 'on the same level.' This is a common feature of writing letters in English in real life.

Content This is a task where the writer has had to invent quite a lot of details. These are realistic and the vocabulary is relevant. If the candidate asked for details of, for example, the student restaurant or the furniture, the examiner would probably think this was irrelevant to the task.

The writer has combined the 'explaining' and 'requesting' content in the three main body paragraphs. Normally, it is safer to keep the content ideas separated in different paragraphs; in this case, however, it is combined effectively because in each paragraph the candidate has asked for information and explained in a realistic way why this is not clear from the website. This ensures that the Task is fully answered.

This was an example of a semi-formal letter in a professional situation, showing you both formal and personal elements, and how to combine them. Model letter 9 in this book shows you a semi-formal letter in a social situation.

Model letter 7: Complaining, explaining, requesting (formal style)

Example Task 7

You recently took a plane to a holiday in a foreign city, and on arrival you found that your luggage was lost. You did not receive your luggage until the last day of your holiday. Write to the airline,

*complaining about this situation
saying why it caused you problems
seeking suitable compensation*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient This is a person you do not know; the Task says 'write to the airline,' so this could be 'Dear Sir or Madam' or 'Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Smith.' In reality, you would probably find out the recipient's name before you write, because this is an important subject.

Style The style will be formal and strong in tone, because you are a customer with a complaint.

Content The Task asks you to complain (about the lost luggage) explain (the problems caused) and request (some compensation.)

Band 9 model letter 7

Dear Mrs Smith,

As you are the head of Customer Services, I am writing regarding the loss of my baggage at Istanbul airport on April 3rd 2015. My baggage consisted of two suitcases, both being clearly labelled in the accepted way, and both being correctly locked.

On arrival at Istanbul, I found that both suitcases were listed as 'missing' and the airline staff could give me no information about their location. This caused me substantial inconvenience, as the suitcases contained my clothing, toiletries and books, and I was obliged to buy all these items from local shops at a very high price. Even when I finally received the suitcases, I found that they were opened, and many items were missing, including clothes and personal effects. This meant that I had to replace these items at my own cost when I returned home.

I am requesting, therefore, that you kindly reimburse me the cost of \$495 for all these items, and I have attached all relevant receipts. As you see, this sum does not include compensation for my inconvenience and wasted time, which I am prepared to forgo if you settle the charge promptly.

I look forward to receiving your confirmation of this payment.

Kind Regards,

Eileen Dubois

(208 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient This formal letter has a suitable greeting and ending, with a clear, strong 'call to action' sentence.

Style The candidate has used a strong, formal style which reflects the fact that she has a complaint to make. She uses some classic 'complaining' and other formal phrases, such as:

'I am writing regarding'

'On arrival at'

'substantial inconvenience'

'I am requesting, therefore, that you kindly reimburse me'

'As you see' (= I have demonstrated that this is true.)

'I am prepared to forgo' (to forgo = to disregard)

'I look forward to receiving your confirmation'

All of these phrases will impress the IELTS examiner in a formal complaint letter.

Content The writer has combined the 'complaining' and 'explaining' ideas in the central paragraph. This is effective, because she explains clearly *why* the problems were so inconvenient in a formal way, using:

'This caused me'

'I was obliged to'

'This meant that I had to'

Other phrases which you can use to 'explain' the implications of problems or complaints are:

'The plane was late. The consequence was that I was forced to wait for three hours.'

'As a result, I had no choice but to wait for three hours.'

'This led to me waiting for three hours.'

'I was ultimately compelled to wait for three hours.'

About numbers in letters:

If you need to write prices in your letter (eg 'the cost of \$495'), then use a well-known money symbol (£/\$/€) and write the number in figures, not words (ie '€495' not 'four hundred and ninety-five Euros.' Remember that the money symbol goes before the number. Don't make it complicated by putting 'cents' in the price (eg \$45.76), because this is completely unnecessary.

If it's a large price, remember to use a comma (not a full stop) before the hundreds, eg 'This would cost us \$1,400 in total.'

If you refer to a room number or a page number, use the figures (eg 'I am complaining about the noise in room 93 at your hotel' and 'I checked on page 137 of the brochure, but there was no information.')

However, if you refer to a number in the general course of the letter, only use the word, not the figure, eg 'I can see three opportunities' and not 'I can see 3 opportunities.'

If you refer to someone's age, only use the words (eg 'My brother is twenty-one this year.')

Model letter 8: Explaining, suggesting, requesting (formal style)

Example Task 8

You are studying at a college which has very limited sports and leisure facilities for students. Write a letter to the principal. In your letter,

*outline the situation
propose ways to improve this situation
request a meeting to discuss this*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient In reality, you would know the principal's name, but you would not know them personally; the principal is older and senior in authority compared to you.

Style The letter will be in a formal style, remembering that the recipient is in authority and is not obliged to follow your suggestions.

Content The Task asks for explaining (the limited facilities) suggesting (improvements) and also requesting (the discussion meeting.)

Band 9 model letter 8

Dear Ms Smith,

I thought you might be interested in some thoughts about the amenities for sports and other free time pursuits here at the college. Although we have a table tennis room, there are no other facilities for students, and this seems a great shame as so many of us would like to socialise after study hours.

If I may suggest some improvements, I think we could adapt classroom 12 (which is rarely used) as a games room, perhaps with Wi-Fi and electrical charging points. I also wonder if we could agree the use of the nearby park on certain afternoons, for team sports, yoga and running. These are quite straightforward steps which would immediately give the student body far greater scope for leisure, with all the benefits this would bring us.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this proposal with you in person, and I hope it will be acceptable if I contact your office assistant to arrange a convenient time.

Kind Regards,

Maria Campos-Costella

(169 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient The candidate uses a suitable formal greeting and ending. The 'call to action' is expressed in a cautious, polite way ('I hope it will be acceptable if...') which reflects the higher authority of the recipient.

Style The candidate uses some important formal phrases for this type of letter to a 'higher figure' recipient:

'I thought you might be interested in' (this is a classic way of beginning a 'suggesting' letter to a principal, a boss etc.)

'this seems a great shame' (not 'this is a great shame,' which would be too direct.)

'If I may suggest some improvements'

'I also wonder if we could' (= here is another suggestion)

'I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to' (= you don't *have* to meet me, but I think it's important.)

Notice how different this formal letter is from a formal letter making a complaint to a business or asking for information. In this letter, the writer emphasises that she has no power to make these suggestions strongly; she offers them for consideration only. In the

exam, ask yourself if the recipient is *obliged* to listen to your ideas; if they are not obliged, use the phrases above.

Other classic phrases in this type of situation are:

'I have been giving some thought to the student cafeteria, and I wonder if we could change . . .'

'If I might give you some comments on the cafeteria, there seem to be two issues of concern.'

'While we all enjoy the cafeteria food, I think there is the opportunity to change . . .'

Content The three content ideas are clearly separated, and introduced with phrases which make their function obvious. The candidate emphasises the benefit of the suggestions ('far greater scope for leisure') and also how easy they would be ('straightforward.') The letter does not give too many technical details (eg about the electrical charging points) but focusses instead on the advantages of the ideas.

The writer has been careful to include suggestions about sport and leisure ('games/yoga and team sports/running') to fulfil the task instruction completely. It is important to read the task instructions carefully to make sure you deal with all these 'small' points, because the examiners will want to see that you have answered them before they can give you a very high score.

Model letter 9: Complaining, requesting (semi-formal style)

Example Task 9

You recently attended a party, where you saw one of the guests being rude to a neighbour in the next house. Write an email to the guest,

*Complaining about their behaviour
Suggesting that the guest apologises to the neighbour
Asking them not to behave like this again*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient This is a person whom you know personally (from the party) but the suggestion in the Task is that they are not a friend (the Task says 'the guest.'). You would certainly know their first name.

Style In this imaginary situation, you know the recipient socially, but you are unhappy with them and you want to make them aware of this. A semi-formal style in a social context is suitable, combining personal and formal.

Remember that personal and formal letters are *much more common* in IELTS GT than semi-formal letters, so you should practise them more.

Content The Task asks you for complaining (about the behaviour), suggesting (the apology) and requesting (that the behaviour is not repeated.)

Band 9 model letter 9

Dear Peter,

I think I need to write to you because of your behaviour at the party last week. This was meant to be a relaxed and friendly occasion, but I must say that you spoiled it by the way you spoke to the neighbour, Mrs Smith. This lady is much older than you, and deserves to be treated with respect by all of us. We were all pretty shocked when you refused to turn down the music when she asked you to.

I do feel that you should go to see Mrs Smith, and apologise for being so impolite. If you're embarrassed to do so, then you should at least write her a note saying that you're sorry, and saying that you hope she was not too offended or upset by your actions.

I also think that you need to make a greater effort to control your temper, and not to speak to people without thinking first of the way your words might be received. There's another party coming up next weekend, and I hope that you'll be there to show us all how well you can behave when you really want to.

Best wishes,

Aftab Geleit

(201 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient The letter is addressed and concluded in a suitable way. 'Dear + first name' is the personal greeting; 'best wishes' + first name + family name' at the end is more formal, but still achieving a personal tone.

Style The letter combines personal and formal elements effectively.

The personal elements are:

Using contractions in four cases

Using informal vocabulary ('pretty shocked/ turn down/sorry/ another party coming up/really want to') at times.

Using some personal letter phrases ('I think I need to/I do feel that/ I hope that you'll be there.')

The more formal elements are:

Using formal phrases to make criticism and proposals:

'I must say that'

'deserves to be treated with respect'

'apologise for being so impolite'

'make a greater effort to control your temper'

Using formal language for criticism and proposals is done in English to emphasise the writer's serious attitude and sense of concern; this is effective in this letter. The use of the 'first name + family name' at the end (rather than just the first name) emphasises this seriousness again.

Content The candidate has used three logical paragraphs to organise the three content ideas, and these are very clear to see. The three sections are roughly the same length, so the letter feels well balanced. The invented details are simple and relevant.

Remember: when you're in the exam, don't waste time thinking of names! Have a simple, common English first name and family name in your mind, so that you are ready to write either a personal, semi-formal or formal letter. Use your real name at the end; there's no reason to invent a name for yourself.

Model letter 10: Apologising (personal and formal styles)

Example Task 10

You have arranged a weekend holiday with a group of friends, but due to your studies you will now be unable to go with them. Write to your friends, and

*Tell them why you are unable to go
Say sorry for this
Suggest an alternative activity at another time*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Explanation of the Task

Recipient These are friends that you obviously know well. Your letter needs to show your sensitivity to the fact that you have disappointed them.

Style The letter will be personal; it is also addressed to more than one person.

Content The Task is asking for explaining (why you can't go), apologising for this, and suggesting another activity. Logically, this should be related to holidays in some way.

Band 9 model letter 10

Dear Peter and Anna,

I'm sorry to say that I have some bad news, which is that I won't be able to go with you on the camping trip as we agreed. The reason is that I am running very late with two of my college assignments, which both have to be handed in on the Monday after the trip. This means that if I go away, I might fail these projects, and so I'd have to wait another six months before going on to the next module of studies.

I'm very sorry for the short notice and for letting you down like this. I can understand it's probably quite annoying for you both, and I can only sympathise with your feelings. If it's any comfort, I feel terrible about it too.

To make up for it, here is an idea you might like. My uncle has a farm in the mountains which would be perfect for another trip in the summer. I could make all the arrangements, book the bus tickets and ask my uncle to show us around the area in his Jeep, which would be a lot of fun. I hope that sounds like a good alternative for you!

Do let me know what you think, and sorry for the trouble once again.

All the best,

Marcus

(217 words)

Why is this a Band 9 letter?

Recipient The greeting and conclusion are personal, showing that these are close friends. The friendly sentence at the end ('Do let me know . . .') is a typical way to conclude a personal letter.

Style The candidate uses generally informal vocabulary and phrasing, including contractions and some phrasal verbs ('to run late/ to go on to/to let someone down/ to make up for something/ to show someone around.'). The examiner will notice these phrasal verbs and give marks for using them naturally.

At the same time, the writer shows that this is a serious subject and that he feels bad about the situation by using a few formal words at key points ('assignments/annoying/sympathise/arrangements/alternative.'). This makes sure that the letter recognises the writer's responsibility for the situation.

Content The three content ideas are organised in three sections, and the opening words of each section make clear that the main idea is being presented.

The writer has invented quite a lot of details about the situation ('the assignment/due on Monday/the bus tickets/the jeep/the uncle in the mountains') and this is probably the *maximum* amount of detail that the IELTS examiner would want to read.

Apologising in a **formal** letter

Usually, the apologising content idea will be part of a personal letter. It is rare for a Task to tell you to apologise in a formal letter. Occasionally, there might be a Task where you write a formal letter to someone in authority (such as a principal or supervisor) to apologise for a misunderstanding or a mistake you have made. If this happens in your exam, the best phrases to use for formal style apologies are:

'Please accept my apologies for this mistake/this accident/this misunderstanding.'

'I can only apologise for this event/this confusion/ this oversight.'

'Please accept my apologies for this whole event, and I assure you that such a misunderstanding will not happen again.'

'On behalf of everyone concerned, I would like to offer apologies for this confusion, and assure you that we will be more careful in future.'

('On behalf of' = I am speaking for the group of people.)

In formal apologies, don't use the words 'forgive me,' 'sorry' or 'say sorry.' The accepted formal style is 'my apologies/to apologise.'

Remember that formal letters should keep emotions to a minimum. For example, the letter in this last example said 'I feel terrible about it too' which is fine in a personal letter, but too emotional for a formal letter. In formal writing, you would need to write 'I deeply regret the inconvenience this has caused you' or 'I was very concerned when I realised that our misunderstanding caused you such inconvenience.'

*

This concludes our first ten model letters. We have introduced the best ways to write these letters, and explained how to get the best possible score in your IELTS GT exam.

Our next two tasks are intended for you to use for practice. For each Task, spend a few minutes analysing the recipient, style and content in the way we explained, and make some notes about the content and your ideas for the details. Spend no more than 5 minutes doing this. Then try to write your letter in about 10 minutes, aiming for about 200 words. Finally, spend about 5 minutes checking your letter for mistakes.

If you can create your Task 1 letter in these 20 minutes in the exam, you will have the necessary 40 minutes left to do the Task 2 essay.

When you have finished your practice letter, compare it to our explanation and model letter for the Task (which is on the following page.) The details of your content will be different from ours, of course, but the content ideas (complaining, requesting, explaining/apologising, suggesting) should be the same, and you should have the same choice of style.

*

Practice Task and model letter 1

Practice Task 1

You recently bought an expensive electronic product from a store, and found that the product does not work properly. Write a letter to the store manager. In your letter,

Complain about the problem

*Propose action for the store to take
Request confirmation that this is agreed*

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Don't look at the following explanation and Band 9 model letter until you have written your letter first!

*

Explanation of the Task

Recipient In reality, you would probably find out the name of the recipient before writing, although you do not know them.

Style This will be a formal letter, emphasising your dissatisfaction with the product and service.

Content The task is asking for complaining (about the product), suggesting (action) and requesting (confirmation.) In a letter of complaint to a business, requesting and suggesting are often similar in content. You will need to invent some details about the product, but you don't need any technical knowledge.

Band 9 model letter

Dear Ms Smith,

I believe you are the customer services manager of City Electronics in Cambridge, and so I am writing to complain about a digital camera I bought from you on 12th March 2015.

Although I have followed all the directions in the manual, I find that the camera does not focus or zoom properly, meaning that is not fit for purpose. I have emailed and phoned your store several times to complain, but nobody has taken ownership of the problem so far.

I therefore ask you to issue an immediate refund of the price (my receipt is attached) onto the credit card that I paid with. I am also requesting that you send a courier to collect the camera from my home address, as I am reluctant to use the regular mail to return it to you in case of further damage.

Would you kindly reply in writing by return, confirming that these steps will be taken and that the refund and collection are planned to go ahead, with the anticipated dates.

I have been a loyal customer for the past three years, and I am confident that you will take all steps to keep my custom.

Kind Regards,

Adoula Mktele

(205 words)

Why is this a band 9 letter?

Recipient The greeting and conclusion are suitable for a formal letter, with an appropriate 'call to action' sentence before 'Kind Regards.' The letter is strong in tone, which is correct for a letter of complaint to a business.

Style The candidate uses several phrases which are ideally suited to formal complaint letters:

'I am writing to complain about'

'I therefore ask you to'

'I am also requesting that you'

'Would you kindly reply in writing by return, confirming that'

She also uses some very realistic formal/commercial terms:

'not fit for purpose'

'taken ownership of the problem'

'the anticipated dates'

'a loyal customer'

'issue an immediate refund'

In reality, a person writing such a letter would choose to use these formal/commercial phrases and terms to show that the subject is serious and that they have credibility.

Content The candidate has separated the 'complaining' content and the 'suggesting/requesting' content into two clearly separate sections. Although the suggesting and requesting are combined, in reality this would be acceptable, because the letter is a complaint and is strongly worded.

The invented details are relevant and sufficient for the situation; it is not necessary to invent the name of the business you are writing to, but this is effective in this letter. The candidate has not given the price of the camera, and this could be added in the sentence that requests a refund.

Practice Task and model letter 2

Practice Task 2

You are currently trying to improve your knowledge of a language which is not your original language. You have a friend who speaks this new language perfectly. Write to your friend,

Explaining why you want to learn this new language

Asking him/her for suggestions on how to learn more quickly

Proposing that you meet your friend to talk about these steps

Begin your letter 'Dear -----'

Do not write any addresses

Write at least 150 words

Don't look at the following explanation and Band 9 model letter until you have written your letter first!

*

Explanation of the Task

Recipient This is a friend; you are asking for a favour and he/she may not want to help you, and so the letter should reflect this.

Style This will be a personal letter, emphasising that you are asking a favour.

Content The Task instruction is about explaining (why you want to learn the language), requesting (some suggestions from the friend) and suggesting (a meeting.)

Band 9 model letter

Dear Peter

I thought it was time to get in touch, especially as I remember you're a fluent speaker of Italian. I might have mentioned this before, but I'm working for an Italian company now, and so I need to speak quite a lot of Italian when I have meetings with the staff.

I wonder if you could give me a few tips on how to speed up my Italian learning? Do you think I should have lessons, or are there any self-study books which you can recommend? Sometimes I think about doing a crash course in Italy, but I think this might be too intensive, and I'd be interested to hear your view on that too.

Maybe, if you're going to be in the area in the next few weeks, we could get together and I could pick your brains about this subject. There is actually a very well-known Italian restaurant in my street, so dinner would be my pleasure, and the surroundings would be perfect!

Let me know what you think, and I hope to see you at some point soon.

All the best,

Nestor

(187 words)

Why is this a band 9 letter?

Recipient The letter has the appropriate beginning and ending for a personal letter to a friend.

The friendly, personal sentence at the end is a typical way to ask a friend to reply to you ('Let me know what you think') without being too strong.

Style The style is generally personal, with some very natural informal vocabulary:

'get in touch'

'give me a few tips'

'a crash course'

'pick your brains' (= ask you lots of questions)

However, the writer uses a few more formal phrases, which show that this is an important subject for him, and that he is trying to be very polite to his friend:

'dinner would be my pleasure'

'self-study books which you can recommend'

'I'd be interested to hear your view on that too.'

The writer introduces his request for help with an indirect question ('I wonder if you could give me . . .') which makes the question polite and not strong. This is then followed by direct questions ('Do you think I should have lessons . . .?') which are more forceful.

In English, people often use indirect questions to begin a request for help or information, even with friends. Other typical indirect questions which you can use in your GT personal style letters are:

'Can you let me know about your plans for the summer?'

'Could you tell me what you're doing in the summer?'

'Do you know what your plans for the summer are?'

'I wonder what your plans for the summer are? Do let me know!'

And some typical indirect questions for formal style letters (especially for requesting information content) are:

'Can you kindly advise me of the cost of the course?'

'Could you therefore confirm the cost of the course?'

'I wonder if you could send me the course details urgently, as I wish to apply very soon.'

'Would you kindly reply to me urgently, with details of the cost, as I wish to apply very soon.'

These last two examples are usually used without a question mark ('?') because they are similar to polite requests.

Content The candidate has organised his three content ideas into three clear paragraphs, and each paragraph begins in a way that makes the content ideas clear to the reader. The invented details are realistic and convincing, and give the impression of a professional person networking with a friend.

Ten things NEVER to do in an IELTS GT Task 1 letter – and how to do them correctly!

1 Never begin a letter with '*Dearest Peter/My Dear Friend/Dear Friend/ Dear Colleague/Dear Boss or Dear Principal,*' or something similar. People can begin letters like this in many other languages, but English is different!

A formal letter should begin with '*Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms Smith*' (or, in the unusual situations we have explained, '*Dear Sir or Madam.*')

A personal letter should begin with '*Dear + first name.*'

There is *never* a reason to begin a letter in a different way!

2 Never end a letter with '*Your friend/ Your brother Pierre/Your angry passenger Ms Kennedy/Your devoted student Ahmed/ Susanna (a student since 2014)*'

A formal letter should finish with a call to action ('I look forward to + -ing') and 'Kind Regards + your first name + your last name.' For example

I look forward to receiving your cheque for this amount before the end of the week.

Kind Regards,

Peter Williams

You can use 'Yours Sincerely/Yours Faithfully' if you wish, as an alternative to 'Kind Regards.'

A personal letter should finish with a friendly comment and 'All the best + your first name.' For example

Drop me a line in the week if you have time.

All the best,

Claudio

Alternatives for 'All the best' in personal letters are 'Very best wishes/Take care/See you soon/Thinking of you/Keep in touch.'

There is *never* a reason to end a letter in a different way!

3 Avoid 'padding.' This means never include too many complicated details or lists of facts about the situation.

For example, in our Model Letter 1, the writer included a detail about 'motorbikes at night.' This is a simple, realistic detail. If the writer included something such as 'The motorbikes are large Honda machines with 1100cc engines and 75cm wheels' then the examiner would consider this to be 'padding' and would reduce your score.

'Padding' means adding unnecessary details to make it longer, without creating genuine content or using language effectively (the verb is 'to pad your writing.') The IELTS examiners will reduce your mark if they think you are doing this. Model Letter 10 in this book (about the holiday trip) is an example of the *maximum* amount of detail you should invent for an IELTS letter.

Item number 6 on this list has more things which might make the IELTS examiner think you are 'padding' your essay – avoid these!

4 Never use personal phrases in a formal letter (and vice-versa.)

For example 'Drop me a line' can only be used in a personal letter to a friend or relative. It cannot be used to request information from a person you don't know.

Other phrases only for personal letters are:

Why don't we ...

If I were you, I'd ...

Do you remember when we ...

Here's an idea!

The thing/ the problem is that ...

I'm really sorry that ...

Looking forward to seeing you on Tuesday (Not 'I look forward,' which is formal.)

Phrases only for formal letters are:

I am writing regarding ...

As you will appreciate, this is ...

May I suggest that ...

I therefore request that you ...

I look forward to receiving your reply promptly. . .

5 Never use contractions in a formal letter.

Contractions ('can't, won't' etc) are only for personal letters. Remember that the full form of 'can't' is 'cannot' (one word) and never 'can not' (two words.)

Remember that in modern English 'shall' is only used for informal/personal *suggestions* ('Shall we go to . . .') but not for the future tense. It is not normal to say 'I shall take the exam in June.' Everyone says 'I will take the exam.'

The negative 'shan't' or 'shall not' is almost never used in modern English today.

There is no reason to write 'I shan't see you/ I shall not see you.' Write 'I won't see you/ I will not see you.'

6 Never use **idioms, clichés, proverbs, slang** or **text abbreviations** in any type of letter.

Idioms It's possible that your English teacher has taught you about traditional idioms such as 'raining cats and dogs' or 'as cool as a cucumber.' In reality, most English-speaking people almost never use these phrases today. They are never used in formal letters, and only by older people (for example, aged 50 +) in personal letters. So don't use idioms, because the IELTS examiner may think you are 'padding' or using memorised phrases.

Clichés A clichés is a phrase which is annoying or meaningless because it is used too often. In IELTS GT, using a cliché runs the risk of reducing your score. Typical clichés to avoid are:

At the end of the day

Last but not least

Second of all

To cut a long story short

I look forward to hearing from you

Proverbs These are advice phrases such as 'A rolling stone gathers no moss' or 'Too many cooks spoil the broth.'

As with the idioms, some English teachers love to teach these things, but in reality these phrases are not used much in modern English. Try to explain yourself clearly without using such proverbs.

For example:

Too many cooks spoil the broth

In a formal letter you could say 'I am worried that the team is too large and so the decision-making is slow.'

In a personal letter you could say 'There are too many people involved these days, and so not much is really getting done.'

Slang These words are too informal or too confusing to be acceptable to an IELTS examiner, even in a GT personal letter. Examples are 'my friend is a nerd/a geek/a creep' or

'the party was cool/wicked/sick.' Don't risk losing marks by using these words in the IELTS exam, either in writing or speaking.

Text abbreviations This means sets of letters such as LOL or CU etc. Again, these letters are too confusing to be acceptable to IELTS examiners, and you will always lose marks if you try to use them.

7 Never write less than 150 words or write more than 250 words.

In the exam, you should count the words after each paragraph, to make sure you are on track to reach between 200 and about 220 words. You should check the time on the clock when you do this too, and be clear how much time you have left. You *must* finish Task 1 in 20 minutes, or Task 2 will be almost impossible to finish.

8 Never include your opinions or ideas about topics or trends *in society* in a GT Task 1 letter.

In the GT Task 2 essay, you will give your thoughts about a situation in society, including whether this is a good or bad trend, or the possible reasons and consequences of the situation. In GT Task 1, however, you should *not* do this; you should only follow the content ideas and the situation details given in the Task.

For example, in Model Letter 3 in this book, the Task asked you to complain about a phone bill. You should not include your thoughts on why large companies give poor customer service, or the social trend towards using mobile phones in certain ways and so on. These kinds of ideas about *society* are purely for Task 2.

9 Never go into the IELTS writing test unless you are sure that your handwriting is very clear to read in English. This may mean that you have to change some of your handwriting for the test. Many strong candidates lose marks because the examiner finds it difficult to read their writing; unfortunately, the examiners won't spend a lot of time trying to read words which are unclear.

10 Never spend more than 20 minutes on Task 1. Remember – at the end of each paragraph, you should count the words you have written and check the time remaining. You should allow a few minutes *inside* the 20 minutes to check your letter. Task 2 will always require 40 minutes work, and of course it carries more marks, so you must spend at least the 40 minutes on the second Task.

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