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The 21-Day System: Three Weeks, One Band 7.0

Pick the one weak skill worth three weeks of real work, hold the other three steady, and hand off to the final 72 hours — plus a printable 21-day tracker.

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What this book is

Three weeks is a different problem from seven days. Seven days is triage — no time to get better at anything, only time to stop losing marks on what you already half-know. Three weeks is long enough to genuinely rebuild one weak skill. It is not long enough to rebuild all four.

This book's whole method is one decision, made early and held to for the rest of the three weeks: pick the single skill furthest below band 7 and spend the bulk of your time building it back up, while giving the other three just enough attention that none of them quietly slip. Not four skills improved a little each — one skill built, three maintained.

What this book is not

It does not teach you Listening, Reading, Writing or Speaking. Every technique this book points you to already has a full treatment elsewhere on this site — *The Band 7.0 Blueprint*, *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0*, *Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook*, *Reading 7.0: The 30/40 Question-Type Priority Map*, *Band 7 Writing Task 2*, and *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*. This book's own content is the 21-day sequencing decision: which skill to build, how the three weeks are shaped around it, and what "maintenance" for the other three actually means, day to day.

It does not cover the final 72 hours in its own words. By Day 2, you are in exactly the position *The 7-Day Emergency Plan's* reader is in a week out — consolidating, not learning — so Part 7 points to that book's own Parts 5, 6 and 7 by name for the day-before and test-morning detail, rather than repeating what that book already covers well.

It does not decide whether three weeks is the right amount of time for you. *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0's* own Part 3 — "Are you actually ready to book the test?" — already answers that question. If you genuinely have more or less than three weeks, this is the wrong book to force onto your own timeline: come back to it if the number changes, or use *The 7-Day Emergency Plan* instead if seven days is closer to the truth.

Who this is for

Someone with roughly three weeks before their test, who already has some ability in every skill but one clear weak point — not someone starting a skill from nothing. A true beginner in a skill will not reach band 7 in it in three weeks, whatever this book asks of the time, and Part 1 says so plainly rather than pretending otherwise.

How to use it

Part 3 covers Day 21 and Day 20 — the two days you spend finding out which skill actually needs the three weeks. Part 4 is Week 1, Part 5 is Week 2, Part 6 is Week 3, and Part 7 hands off to *The 7-Day Emergency Plan* for the final two days and the test morning itself. Part 8 is a printable tracker — one row per day for all 21 days. Read Parts 1–3 once, in order, before you start; after that, open only the week you are in.

One honest note

Nothing in this book claims that following it produces a specific score, and no number in it is invented. Every technique it names is credited to the book that actually teaches it — this book's only original content is the sequencing decision itself: which one skill to build, and how to hold the other three steady while you do. A skill starting from near-zero will not reach band 7 in it in 21 days no matter how the three weeks are spent; this book is for narrowing a real but bounded gap, not for manufacturing one that is not there. Only an official test result tells you your actual band.

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Part 1 — Why three weeks changes the strategy

1.1 One skill built, three maintained

The Band 7.0 Blueprint sketches this idea in its own §7.2, "Turning one weak skill into a two-week focus" — pick the skill costing you the most marks and spend a concentrated stretch of time on it alone. This book takes that sketch and builds the full three-week version of it, because three weeks is enough runway to make the idea work properly rather than just start it.

The instinct with three weeks free is to spread the time evenly: a bit of Listening, a bit of Reading, a bit of Writing, a bit of Speaking, each week. Resist it. Splitting 21 days four ways produces a candidate who is a little better at everything and not meaningfully better at the one skill that was actually below band 7. Three weeks concentrated on that single weakest skill, with the other three held steady rather than improved, is the higher-yield split — the same "fix the floor, not the ceiling" logic *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0* applies inside a single skill's own four criteria, applied here one level up, across all four skills at once.

This is the book's whole method, stated once, up front, because everything from Part 3 onward is just the mechanics of carrying it out: one skill gets built, three get maintained, and the three weeks are shaped entirely around making that split real rather than a good intention that quietly becomes four skills again by Week 2.

1.2 What three weeks can and cannot fix

Be honest about which kind of gap you actually have, because the plan only works if you are.

A skill starting from near-zero — never having attempted a Task 2 essay under time, never having spoken for two minutes without stopping, never having sat a full Listening section — will not reach band 7 in it in 21 days, no matter how the three weeks are spent. This book does not pretend otherwise, and no plan can promise otherwise. If this describes your weakest skill, three weeks buys real, visible progress toward band 7, not arrival at it — and that is still worth having, but it is not the same claim this book makes for a smaller gap.

What three weeks can fix is a real but bounded gap: roughly half a band to one band in your weakest skill, as a rule of thumb, not an invented statistic — tied to the honest read Part 3's self-tests give you, not to how far behind the skill merely feels. That is the gap this book is built for. A reader with less time than that should turn to *The 7-Day Emergency Plan* instead; a reader whose gap is genuinely too wide for three weeks is better served waiting and building the skill up first, or by the longer 30, 60 and 90-day plans this site plans to publish in this same category. Neither is a failure of this book's method — they are the honest limits of what three weeks buys anyone.

Part 2 — What's changing in 2026



The Band 7.0 Blueprint covers the full delivery-mode picture in its §1.4 — read that for the whole story of paper-based testing retiring worldwide from mid-2026, the Writing on Paper option, the UKVI computer-only track, and One Skill Retake. This book does not repeat any of that.

The one fact that matters for a three-week plan specifically: **confirm, today, which delivery mode you are actually sitting.** Week 3's stamina practice in Part 6 should be run under the same delivery mode you will actually sit — typed or handwritten changes how a full-length timed session feels, and finding that out on test day itself is the wrong time to find it out. Check this against your own booking confirmation now, before Part 3 starts, and carry the answer forward through all three weeks.

Part 3 — Day 21–20: Diagnose, then pick the one arc

3.1 Run all four self-tests before choosing anything

The single biggest mistake in a three-week plan is picking the skill to build based on a hunch, rather than on an honest measurement. The skill that feels weakest is not always the skill that actually is — and a wrong choice here does not just waste a day, it wastes the three weeks the whole book is built around, because Part 4 onward assumes the right skill was picked here.

The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0's own Part 2 already built the fastest honest diagnostic available: a self-test for each of Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Run all four across Day 21 and Day 20 — two days, not one, because a self-test taken while tired or rushed on a single day is less reliable than the same four spread across two. *Listening 7.0* and *Reading 7.0* each add their own diagnostic on top of the general one, breaking a general "Listening is weak" or "Reading is weak" result down by question type — run those too, for whichever of the two looks like a candidate for Part 3.2's decision below.

Do not skip this step because you already have a strong sense of your weakest skill. A hunch that turns out right costs you nothing by being checked. A hunch that turns out wrong, uncorrected, costs you the three weeks.

3.2 The one-skill decision rule

With four self-test results in hand, pick one skill to build for the next three weeks: the skill furthest below band 7 that is *not* so far below it that Part 1.2's "three weeks can't fix this" limit applies. Between two candidates that are both genuinely fixable in three weeks, the further one — not the closer one — is the right pick, because the closer skill is more likely to reach band 7 even on a lighter maintenance schedule, while the further one needs the concentrated time this book gives it.

A worked example. Say a candidate's four self-tests come back roughly: Listening near band 7 already, Reading a little below it, Writing clearly the weakest of the four, and Speaking a little below Reading. Writing is the pick — not because Writing is inherently the hardest skill to fix, but because it is this candidate's furthest-below-target result that still sits inside the "real but bounded gap" Part 1.2 describes, rather than a from-scratch gap three weeks cannot close. Reading and Speaking, both closer to the line already, become maintenance skills; Listening, already near band 7, needs only enough upkeep to stay there. Parts 4 through 6 follow this same candidate's Writing build through all three weeks, as the running illustration for whichever skill your own self-tests actually flag.

3.3 What maintenance means for the other three

Maintenance is not zero practice. A skill given no attention for three weeks can genuinely slip — the goal is a light, defined weekly touch for each of the three skills not being built, not silence until test week.

One touch a week, per maintained skill, is enough: a single self-test-style set from *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0's* own Part 2 family, or one worked example straight from that skill's own deep-dive book —

Listening 7.0, Reading 7.0, Band 7 Writing Task 2 or IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3, whichever three apply once the fourth is chosen for building. The point of maintenance is that none of the other three are meaningfully worse on test day than they are today on Day 20 — not that they improve. Improvement is what the one chosen skill's three weeks are for.

Part 4 — Week 1 (Days 19–15): Foundation reps



4.1 Untimed, technique-first practice in the chosen skill

Week 1 is about building the habit before adding speed to it. Whichever skill Part 3 picked, go straight to that skill's own deep-dive book for the specific technique-teaching sections it already owns — this book does not re-teach any of them, only tells you which to open this week.

Skill chosen	Go to
Listening	<i>Listening 7.0's</i> Part 4, the six question-type playbook — drill the type your self-test flagged first
Reading	<i>Reading 7.0's</i> Part 4 priority map, then its Part 5 paraphrase drill
Writing	<i>Band 7 Writing Task 2's</i> Part 3, the criterion that keeps candidates at band 6
Speaking	<i>IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3's</i> own technique chapters for whichever part your self-test flagged

Drill the technique without the clock this week. Speed comes in Week 2 — Week 1's only job is making sure the technique itself is right before any time pressure is added on top of it.

Continuing the Part 3.2 example: for a candidate who picked Writing, Week 1 means opening *Band 7 Writing Task 2's* Part 3 chapter for whichever criterion the self-test essay lost the most marks on, and writing two or three untimed paragraphs a day against that single criterion — not a full untimed essay every day, and not every criterion at once. The habit being built is narrow on purpose: get the one criterion right without the clock before Week 2 puts the clock back.

4.2 The other three skills' Week 1 maintenance session

One short, named task per maintained skill this week, drawn straight from that skill's own book — the same weekly touch Part 3.3 defined, now made concrete for Week 1 specifically.

For the Writing-example candidate, that means: one Listening self-test-style set from *The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0's* Part 2, one Reading passage worked through against *Reading 7.0's* own Part 4 map, and one Speaking Part 2 topic recorded and played back once against *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*. Whichever skill was actually chosen for building, the other three each get one session of this shape and no more this week — the point is steady, not growing.

Part 5 — Week 2 (Days 14–8): Timed practice

5.1 Same skill, now under the clock

Week 2 takes the technique Week 1 built and puts it under the real time pressure of the actual test section or task — the same technique, not a new one, now practised at full length and under the clock. For the Writing-example candidate, that means full 40-minute Task 2 essays, marked immediately afterward against *Band 7 Writing Task 2*'s own band 6 vs. band 7 table, still focused on the single criterion Week 1 targeted rather than every criterion at once.

If the technique is "not fast enough yet" under time — the right idea, produced too slowly to finish — the fix is to drop back to a shorter untimed rep for a day, not to add a second new technique on top of the first. Panicking and reaching for something else this week is the same mistake Part 1.1 warns against at the whole-skill level, happening here inside a single week instead.

5.2 Maintenance continues, unchanged in shape

Run the same three maintenance sessions Week 1 defined — one touch each for the skills not being built, in the same shape as before. Nothing changes here on purpose: consistency across all three weeks is itself part of the method, not an oversight. A reader who assumes Week 2's maintenance needs to look different from Week 1's is adding complexity the plan does not call for.

Part 6 — Week 3 (Days 7–3): Exam speed and stamina



6.1 Full-length timed practice, back-to-back with a second skill

Week 3 adds the one thing two weeks of single-skill drilling cannot test on its own: stamina. Run the chosen skill at full exam length and speed, paired in the same session with at least one maintained skill, back to back, the way the real test actually runs sections one after another. For the Writing-example candidate, that means a full Task 2 essay immediately followed by a Reading passage or a Listening section, under the delivery mode Part 2 had you confirm — the fatigue of a second section straight after the first is exactly what a Week 1 or Week 2 session, done alone, never puts to the test.

6.2 Reading the Week 3 result honestly

A still-weak Week 3 result is information, not a verdict. It means the chosen skill's build needs another cycle of the same drilling, not a change of plan three days out and not panic. A genuinely strong result means the three weeks have done their job, and Part 7 is where you consolidate rather than push further. Either way, what Week 3 tells you feeds directly into how you spend the final two days in Part 7 — read it for that, not as a pass or fail on the three weeks as a whole.

Part 7 — Day 2 to test day

7.1 You are now where *The 7-Day Emergency Plan's* reader is

From Day 2 onward, you are in exactly the position *The 7-Day Emergency Plan's* own reader is in a week out — three weeks of building and maintaining behind you, two days and a test morning ahead. That book already covers this ground in full: its Part 5 on consolidating rather than cramming, its Part 6 on the day before, and its Part 7 on the test morning itself. Open those three parts now, by name, rather than this book re-deriving the same material — the discipline this whole book has followed since Part 1: point to the book that already owns a piece of ground, rather than writing a second, weaker version of it here.

Part 8 — The printable 21-Day Tracker

Print these two pages, or copy the grid onto paper, and fill them in with a pen as you go. One row per day. Write in the day's building-skill task before you start it, tick the maintenance box on whichever day that week's maintenance touch falls, and before bed rate your own confidence from 1 (still shaky) to 5 (solid under time) in the skill you are building.

Days 21–8: Diagnose, Week 1 and Week 2

Day	Building-skill task	Maintenance touch	Confidence (1–5)
Day 21		☐	
Day 20		☐	
Day 19		☐	
Day 18		☐	
Day 17		☐	
Day 16		☐	
Day 15		☐	
Day 14		☐	
Day 13		☐	
Day 12		☐	
Day 11		☐	
Day 10		☐	
Day 9		☐	
Day 8		☐	

Days 7–1: Week 3 and the taper

Day	Building-skill task	Maintenance touch	Confidence (1–5)
Day 7		☐	
Day 6		☐	
Day 5		☐	
Day 4		☐	
Day 3		☐	
Day 2		☐	
Day 1		☐	

A confidence rating that isn't climbing across the three weeks is worth noticing on its own — it's a sign that the chosen skill's build needs another cycle, the same reading Part 6.2 gives the Week 3 result, checked here against how every week actually went rather than only your Day 21 guess.

The end

You started with three weeks and one clear question: which of your four skills was actually below band 7. If you followed the plan, Days 21 and 20 answered that question honestly instead of by hunch, three weeks built that one skill up while the other three stayed steady, and from Day 2 you handed off to *The 7-Day Emergency Plan* for the final stretch and the test morning itself.

None of this replaces the preparation that came before these three weeks. What it does is make sure that time went to the one place it would pay off the most, rather than being spread thin across all four skills at once.

About the pointers. Nothing in this book teaches a technique from scratch — every pointer sends you to a full treatment already published on this site. If a pointer did not make sense on its own, the book it names is where the explanation actually lives.

About the promise. Nothing here is a guarantee. Every technique named in this book is stated as something that could help you build one weak skill back up while holding the other three steady, not as a fixed amount of score improvement. A skill starting from near-zero will not reach band 7 in it in 21 days, whatever the three weeks are spent on. Only an official test result determines your actual band.

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

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