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Writing 7.0: The Four Criteria, Decoded Sentence by Sentence

What separates a band-6.5 sentence from a band-7 sentence under each of the four official criteria — the exact word, clause or connector that changed, and why an examiner reads it differently.

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Writing 7.0: The Four Criteria, Decoded Sentence by Sentence

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What this book is

The Band 7.0 Blueprint, also free on this site, already states the four official Writing criteria in plain terms — Task Achievement or Task Response, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy — and sketches how each task is built. This book does not repeat any of that. It picks up exactly where it stops: not what the four criteria mean, but what separates a band-6.5 sentence from a band-7 sentence, one criterion at a time, shown at the level of the actual sentence you write.

Every part below follows the same shape: a criterion, a sentence that plausibly earns 6.5, the same idea rewritten to plausibly earn 7, and the specific move that closes the gap. Not "use more advanced vocabulary" or "vary your sentence structure" — the exact word, clause or connector that changed, and why an examiner reads it differently.

Vocabulary and Phrasing, also free on this site, already gives sixty-four word- and phrase-level near-miss pairs across eight topics. This book does not repeat that bank. Its own Lexical Resource part works one level up — how a word choice lands inside a full sentence, not a second vocabulary list.

What this book is not

It is not a whole-essay guide to Task 1 or Task 2 structure. *The Band 7.0 Blueprint* already covers that. This book zooms in, to the sentence, and stays there.

It does not cover Listening, Reading or Speaking. Each has its own dedicated book on this site. This book is Writing only.

The one promise this book makes

Band 7 in Writing is not four separate skills to improve in the abstract. It is four lenses an examiner applies to every sentence you write. This book shows you what your own sentences look like through each lens, what a 6.5 sentence and a 7 sentence actually look like side by side, and the specific move that closes the gap. No fix here is claimed to guarantee a band increase — the four criteria are judged as a whole, by a trained examiner, against published descriptors, not scored as an additive checklist. Only an official test result determines your actual band.

One thing to know before you start

Every sentence, paragraph and worked example in this book was written for it. None of it is a transcription or a close copy of any real IELTS Writing prompt, model answer or examiner comment — the real test's content is never reproduced, and nothing here should be mistaken for it.

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Part 1 — The four criteria, past the summary



1.1 What the four criteria actually reward

The Band 7.0 Blueprint already states the four criteria in plain terms, and this book leans on that framing rather than restating it from scratch. Each of the four is worth a quarter of your Writing band: Task Achievement (Task 1) or Task Response (Task 2), Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy.

One thing is worth stating plainly before this book goes any further. It changes how you should read every part that follows. An examiner does not tally points against a checklist and add them up. They read your whole response and judge it against each criterion's published band descriptors as a whole. A response with one weak paragraph and three strong ones is not simply "three-quarters good." This book's before-and-after sentences show you the pattern an examiner is trained to notice. They are not a scoring rubric. You cannot apply them to your own writing and expect an exact number back.

1.2 Why sentence level, not essay level

Most Writing advice stays at the level of the whole essay. Or it restates a criterion's own adjectives: "be more coherent," "use a wider range of vocabulary." That advice is true and almost useless. It does not tell you what to actually change in the sentence sitting in front of you.

This book commits to something narrower and more concrete instead. For each criterion, you will see a short original sentence that plausibly earns 6.5, the same idea rewritten to plausibly earn 7, and the specific move that separates them: a reworded connector, a restructured clause, a swapped collocation. Four criteria, one habit each, shown in your own sentences rather than described in the abstract.

Part 2 — What changed in 2026 — Writing's own version

The Band 7.0 Blueprint already covers the delivery-mode changes in full: the paper-based test is retiring worldwide from mid-2026, on a timeline that varies by market. This book does not repeat any of that. Writing's own consequence of the move is a genuine choice, not just a mechanic, and it is worth stating on its own terms.

2.1 The Writing on Paper option, and what it actually trades off

In selected markets, you can choose **Writing on Paper**. You sit Listening and Reading on computer, then handwrite the Writing section on paper instead of typing it. Whether that option exists at your own test centre is worth checking directly. It varies by market, and it changes over time.

Here is the trade-off worth thinking through before you choose. Typing makes mid-response editing cheap. Say you notice a weak paragraph, a wrong collocation, or a position statement that does not quite answer the question. You can fix it in place: delete a sentence, insert a clause, move a paragraph, all without recopying a whole page by hand. Handwriting does not offer that. A candidate who spots the same problem on paper faces a harder choice — cross it out messily, or leave it and hope the examiner reads past it.

That difference changes the realistic time-management calculus this book assumes throughout. Every "revise as you go" habit in the parts that follow is still correct in substance if you are handwriting. It is just costlier

in practice. Budget planning time accordingly, and expect to do more of your revising in your head, before the sentence goes on the page, rather than after.

Part 3 — Task Achievement / Task Response, sentence by sentence



3.1 Task 1: the overview sentence, decoded

In Task 1, one sentence carries more weight than any other: the overview. It is the sentence that tells the examiner you can see the shape of the data, not just list what is in it. *The Band 7.0 Blueprint* sketches Task 1's overall structure; this section zooms in on that one sentence.

At band 6: "The chart shows information about coffee consumption in four countries in 2020, 2021 and 2022, and there were some increases and some decreases over the three years."

That sentence is not wrong. It is also not an overview. It restates what the chart is. Then it adds a vague gesture at change without saying what actually stands out. An examiner reading it learns almost nothing they could not have guessed from the chart's title.

Written: "Overall, coffee consumption rose steadily in Country A and Country B over the period, while Country C's consumption fell sharply after 2021 and Country D's remained broadly flat throughout."

The difference is not vocabulary. The 7-band sentence has done the actual work Task 1 asks for. It names the one or two trends that matter most, and states them specifically. It does not list every data point or gesture at "some increases and some decreases." A reader who has never seen the chart still comes away knowing its shape.

3.2 Task 2: the position sentence, decoded

Task 2 asks a question, directly or indirectly, and expects an answer. *The Band 7.0 Blueprint* covers Task 2's whole-essay strategy; this section zooms in on the sentence that states your answer.

At band 6: "This essay will discuss both sides of this issue and give my opinion."

That sentence commits to nothing. It tells the examiner an opinion is coming, eventually. It does not say what it is, or how the essay will get there.

Written: "While there are clear benefits to remote working for individual employees, this essay argues that its long-term costs to workplace collaboration make it a poor default for most organisations."

The 7-band sentence states an actual position, specific enough that a reader could disagree with it. It previews the shape the response will take too — a concession, then the argument. That is what Task Response rewards at the level of a single sentence: not the presence of an opinion,

but a position stated clearly enough to be tested against the rest of the response.

3.3 The one trap: addressing part of the task, not all of it

A single missed half of a two-part question is one of the most common ways an otherwise strong response loses Task Response marks, and it happens at the level of the opening, not somewhere buried in the body.

Take a Task 2 question asking a candidate to discuss the causes of a problem *and* suggest solutions.

At band 6: "Traffic congestion is a serious problem in many cities, caused mainly by the rising number of private vehicles and a lack of investment in public transport."

That opening is well written. It also signals only one half of the task. An examiner reading it has no reason to expect solutions are coming at all.

Written: "Traffic congestion in many cities stems from two related causes — too many private vehicles and too little public transport — and this essay considers what cities can realistically do about both."

The second version signals, in its own opening sentence, that both halves of the task are coming. The paragraphs that follow may end up similar in either version. What changes is whether the examiner can tell, from the first sentence, that the whole task has been understood.

Part 4 — Coherence and Cohesion, sentence by sentence

4.1 The topic-sentence habit

A paragraph's opening sentence tells the examiner what the paragraph is about before they read the rest of it. When that opening sentence is a supporting detail instead, the whole paragraph reads as harder to follow than it actually is.

At band 6: "For example, many companies now allow staff to choose their own hours, which has become especially common since 2020."

Read on its own, that sentence is a fact in search of a point. It only makes sense once the reader has already worked out, from later sentences, what larger claim it is supporting.

Written: "Flexible working arrangements have become one of the clearest signs of this shift in employer attitudes, and flexible hours are the most visible example."

The 7-band version states the paragraph's own point first. Flexible working reflects a shift in employer attitudes; the supporting detail arrives after that. A reader now knows, from the first sentence, what the rest of the paragraph is going to argue.

4.2 Cohesive devices without the mechanical-connector trap

One pattern shows up repeatedly in 6.5-band writing: a paragraph that opens nearly every sentence with a connector, regardless of whether one is needed.

At band 6: "Furthermore, remote work can reduce commuting time. Moreover, it can improve work-life balance for many employees. In addition, it may lower a company's office costs."

Each sentence here is fine on its own. Strung together, the connectors do not connect anything. They sit at the front of three unrelated facts, doing the job a paragraph's own logic should be doing.

Written: "Remote work can reduce commuting time and improve work-life balance for employees, while also lowering a company's office costs — three separate benefits that reinforce the same underlying case for flexibility."

The 7-band version carries the same three facts without a connector opening every sentence. Cohesion comes instead from combining related ideas into one sentence, and from a closing clause that ties them back to a single point. A connector is not banned. It is used only where it is actually doing work, not as a habit repeated at the start of every sentence.

4.3 Pronoun referencing that doesn't lose the reader

At band 6: "The government increased funding for public transport and reduced parking fees in the city centre, but this did not solve the problem."

What does "this" refer to — the funding increase, the fee reduction, or both together? The sentence does not say, and a reader has to guess.

Written: "The government increased funding for public transport and reduced parking fees in the city centre, but neither measure solved the underlying problem of traffic volume."

The 7-band version replaces the ambiguous "this" with a specific referent — "neither measure" — so the reader knows exactly what is being judged to have failed.

4.4 Paragraphing as a cohesion signal, not decoration

One idea per paragraph is not a formatting rule for its own sake — it is itself a cohesion signal. A paragraph break tells the reader "a new point starts here" before they read a single word of it. Part 3's Task-specific openings already showed what a strong first sentence of a paragraph looks like; the paragraph break is what makes that first sentence land as a signal rather than just another sentence in a continuous block.

Part 5 — Lexical Resource, sentence by sentence



Vocabulary and Phrasing, also free on this site, already catalogues sixty-four word- and phrase-level near-miss pairs across eight topics — the collocation errors that cost marks one word at a time. This part does not repeat that bank. It works one level up: how a word choice lands inside a full sentence, not a second vocabulary list.

5.1 Collocation, in a full sentence

A near-miss collocation reads differently in context than it does in isolation, and seeing it inside a real sentence is often what makes the error obvious.

At band 6: "The government should do more effort to reduce traffic congestion in major cities."

"Do effort" is a near-miss for "make an effort," the kind of pairing error *Vocabulary and Phrasing* catalogues directly. Inside a full sentence, it is

the one word an examiner's eye catches first, even when the rest of the sentence is otherwise controlled.

Written: "The government should make a greater effort to reduce traffic congestion in major cities."

One word changed. The rest of the sentence's structure, argument and length are identical, which is itself the point. Lexical Resource is not judged by how sophisticated your vocabulary sounds. It is judged by whether the words you actually chose are the ones that collocate correctly.

5.2 Register: the informal slip

At band 6: "A lot of kids these days don't get enough exercise, and it's becoming a real problem."

Nothing here is grammatically wrong. It is simply the wrong register for a formal essay. "A lot of," "kids," and the contraction "it's" all belong in speech, not in a Task 2 response.

Written: "Many children today do not get sufficient exercise, and this has become a significant public health concern."

The 7-band version keeps the same claim and swaps four informal choices for their formal equivalents. None of the substitutions are exotic or unusual words. The fix is register, not sophistication.

5.3 Paraphrasing the question, not copying it

Reading 7.0: The 30/40 Question-Type Priority Map already names paraphrase as the mechanic that makes reading questions harder to

answer by scanning alone. The same mechanic matters in Writing, on the producing side rather than the receiving side.

At band 6: "Some people think that the government should spend more money on public transport than on building new roads. Discuss this statement and give your opinion."

That is not a weak sentence. It is the prompt itself, lifted into the introduction nearly word for word. An examiner reading an introduction that restates the question this closely has no evidence yet that the candidate has understood it, only that they can copy it.

Written: "Whether public funds are better spent expanding public transport networks or building new roads is a question that divides opinion, particularly in rapidly growing cities."

The 7-band version states the same underlying issue in the writer's own words, signalling that the prompt has actually been understood rather than transcribed.

Part 6 — Grammatical Range and Accuracy, sentence by sentence

6.1 Controlled complexity vs. safe short sentences

At band 6: "Many people work from home now. This started during the pandemic. It has continued since then. Some companies still allow it."

Every sentence here is grammatically correct, and that is exactly the problem. A string of short, safe sentences avoids grammatical errors by avoiding grammatical risk. Grammatical Range and Accuracy rewards range, not just accuracy.

Written: "Many people have continued to work from home since the pandemic first made it necessary, and a number of companies have chosen to keep the arrangement permanently."

The 7-band version combines the same four facts into one sentence. A subordinate clause — "since the pandemic first made it necessary" — shows a controlled, correctly built relationship between two ideas, instead of presenting each fact in isolation.

6.2 The one-error-doesn't-sink-a-band mechanic

One common misconception is worth clearing up before Part 6 goes any further. A 7-band response is not a response with zero grammatical errors. The published descriptors reward range attempted with control. A candidate who writes only short, safe sentences to avoid any risk of error is optimising the wrong thing. A response with a wider range of correctly and confidently handled structures, and the occasional minor slip,

generally reads as stronger than a response with perfect but uniformly simple sentences. Section 6.1's fix is not "write error-free sentences." It is "attempt the subordination, and get it right most of the time."

6.3 Two common 6.5 grammar patterns and their fixes

Subject-verb agreement across a long noun phrase. The longer the distance between a sentence's subject and its verb, the more likely an agreement error slips in.

At band 6: "The number of students who choose to study abroad each year have increased significantly."

The verb "have" agrees with the nearest noun, "students," rather than with the actual subject, "the number." A long noun phrase between subject and verb is exactly where this error tends to appear.

Written: "The number of students who choose to study abroad each year has increased significantly."

The fix is a single word. Check agreement against the sentence's real subject, not the noun sitting closest to the verb, and it catches it.

Articles with abstract nouns. Abstract nouns often take no article at all, and adding one is a frequent 6.5-band slip.

At band 6: "The education is the most important factor in a country's long-term development."

Written: "Education is the most important factor in a country's long-term development."

Used generally, as it is here, "education" needs no article. "The education" would only be correct referring to a specific, already-identified education — a specific programme or a specific person's schooling — not education as a general concept.

Part 7 — One paragraph, decoded across all four criteria

Parts 3 through 6 each showed one criterion's fix in isolation. A real response has to hold all four at once. This part takes a single original Task 2 body paragraph, responding to a question about whether increased screen time has weakened young people's face-to-face communication skills, and rewrites it from a plausible 6.5 to a plausible 7 — the same paragraph's argument, decoded criterion by criterion.

7.1 The paragraph, at 6.5

At band 6: "A lot of young people spend most of their free time on their phones nowadays. This has a big impact on their communication skills. For example, some teenagers find it hard to make eye contact during a conversation. Furthermore, they often struggle to read other people's body language. Moreover, group projects at school have become harder for teachers to manage because students prefer messaging each other instead of talking face-to-face. This is a serious problem that schools need to do more effort to fix."

7.2 The same paragraph, at 7

Extensive smartphone use among young people has begun to erode a specific skill: reading another person's face-to-face cues. Teenagers who spend most of their free time messaging rather than talking often find eye contact and body language harder to interpret than earlier generations did. This shows up concretely in schools, where teachers report that students increasingly default to messaging even when working together in the same room. Addressing that shift will require schools to make a genuine effort, not just a token one, to build face-to-face collaboration back into how group work is structured.

7.3 What changed, criterion by criterion

Task Response (Part 3). The 6.5 version opens with a general observation — "a lot of young people spend most of their free time on their phones" — before stating any actual claim. The 7 version opens by stating the specific claim the paragraph will support: a particular skill has eroded. That is the same move Part 3.2 showed for a Task 2 position sentence.

Coherence and Cohesion (Part 4). The 6.5 version strings three "for example / furthermore / moreover" sentences together. Each carries one fact, with no logical connection beyond the connector itself — the exact mechanical-connector pattern Part 4.2 named. The 7 version combines the same facts into two sentences built around an actual relationship between them, and uses connectors only where they add information. It

also replaces "this" in the closing sentence with the specific referent "that shift," the fix Part 4.3 showed for ambiguous pronoun reference.

Lexical Resource (Part 5). The 6.5 version's closing sentence uses "do more effort," the same near-miss collocation Part 5.1 corrected to "make an effort." The 7 version fixes it. It also drops the informal "a lot of" and "nowadays" in favour of the more formal "extensive," with no time-filler at all — the register fix Part 5.2 argued for.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy (Part 6). The 6.5 version is written almost entirely in short, grammatically safe sentences. The 7 version combines several of the same facts into longer sentences with subordinate clauses, such as "where teachers report that students increasingly default to messaging even when working together in the same room." That is the controlled-complexity move Part 6.1 argued for: attempting real grammatical range rather than avoiding risk.

Nothing about the paragraph's underlying argument changed between the two versions. What changed is four specific, repeatable moves, one per criterion, applied to the same idea.

Part 8 — Checking your own progress

8.1 This book is technique, not an examiner

This book teaches technique. It cannot tell you what band your own writing would actually earn. That takes a trained examiner, reading a full response against the published descriptors — something no self-check can substitute for.

What it can do is give you a way to look at your own sentences. Take a paragraph you have already written, for a practice essay or an actual test attempt. Check it against each part of this book in turn. Does the opening sentence state the paragraph's point, or bury it? Are the connectors doing work, or just sitting at the front of each sentence out of habit? Is there a collocation that would read differently in context than it does in your head? Are you writing only short, safe sentences to avoid risk?

The Minimum-Effort Path to 7.0 already gives this site's own stopping-rule philosophy for checking progress. Do not keep polishing a skill that already clears the line, and do not guess at where you stand. The same discipline applies here. Use an official practice test and, where possible, feedback from a qualified source, rather than treating this book's own judgement of your writing as a substitute for either.

The end

You started this book with four criteria you could probably already name. You finish it with four specific habits: state the paragraph's point before the supporting detail, use a connector only where it adds information, check a collocation inside the whole sentence rather than in isolation, and attempt real sentence complexity instead of retreating to short, safe sentences.

None of it requires memorising a longer vocabulary list or a more complicated grammar rule than you already know. It requires applying the fix, sentence by sentence, to the writing you were already going to do.

About the sentences and paragraph. Every sentence, and the full paragraph in Part 7, were written for this book. None of it is official IELTS content, and none of it is a transcription or a close copy of any real prompt, model answer or examiner comment. Practising with an invented example teaches the technique; only a trained examiner's feedback on your own writing tells you where you actually stand.

About the 2026 changes. The delivery-mode details in Part 2 were checked against ielts.org shortly before publication. Delivery details are exactly the kind of thing that gets adjusted over time. Confirm current rules with ielts.org and with your own test centre before you rely on them.

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

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