

General IELTS writing task 1

writing a letter

Overview

1. Read the instructions
2. Understanding the 3 different types of letters
3. Using the right opening and closing
4. How to structure your letter
5. Final review and correction
6. Examples of General IELTS writing task 1 a letter

Read the instructions Carefully

The instructions of the task tell you about:

- **The purpose:** **why** you are writing the letter?
- **The content:** **what** you will write in the letter?
- **The recipient:** **who** you are writing the letter to?

Example 1

A friend has agreed to look after your house and pet while you are on holiday. Write a letter to your friend.

In your letter

- *give contact details for when you are away*
- *give instructions about how to care for your pet*
- *describe other household duties*
- **The purpose:** to provide **detailed information on how to look after your house and your pet**
- **The content:** provide **contact details** on how to reach you during your trip (e.g email, phone, address); instructions on **how to take care of your pet** (e.g. when, what to feed); mention **anything else that needs to be done** (e.g. water plants, pay bills,...)
- **The recipient:** your friend

Example 2

You find that your study load is too heavy. Write a letter to your college teacher explaining why you need to withdraw from two courses. Ask if it is possible to obtain a refund.

- **The purpose:** to explain **why you want to stop studying and ask for a refund**
- **The content:** explain you want to stop studying because it is too much work as well as ask if it is possible to **get some money back**.
- **The recipient:** your college teacher.

Example 3

You would like to participate in a work-related seminar in another country. Write a letter to the person in charge of the seminar and ask for detailed information regarding the dates, program, accommodation and cost.

- **The purpose:** to ask **detailed information about a seminar** you want to attend
- **The content:** Ask information on **the dates, the program, the accommodation and the cost**.
- **The recipient:** the person in charge organising the seminar

Knowing **the recipient** of your letter **will determine what kind of style and language you will use**. For that reason **it is crucial for you to read the instructions carefully so you know who you are writing to**. As we all know, you cannot use the same writing style that you use with your friend, when you write to the CEO of a large company.

On the other hand, **the content and the purpose** will help you with **what you need to write inside the letter** as well as the **overall structure of the letter**.

Next we'll have a look at the 3 different types of letters.

The 3 Different Types of Letters

There are **three types of letters** in the General IELTS task 1:

- **A formal letter: someone you don't know:** e.g. The manager of a company
- **A semi formal letter: someone you know a little bit:** e.g. your teacher, your boss
- **A personal or informal letter: someone you know very well :** e.g. your friend

Looking back at **the previous examples:**

- **Example 1: the recipient your friend** is a **personal/informal letter.**
- **Example 2: the recipient your teacher** is a **semi formal letter**
- **Example 3: the person organising the seminar** is a **formal letter**

As said before the type of letter will not only influence your style and language use, but it will **determine how you should open (start) and close (finish) your letter.**

Opening and Closing for the 3 different letters

How you open/start and close your letter depends on the recipient. This means who you write to determines not only the beginning and ending of your letter, but also the formality or style of your letter.

Formal letters

- **Opening:**
 - **Dear Sir/Madam:** if you don't know who you are writing to
 - **Dear Mr./Miss/Mrs.+ the last name** of the recipient: if you do know the person
- **Closing:**
 - **Yours faithfully + your full name**

Semi-formal letters

- **Opening: Dear Mr./Miss/Mrs.+ the last name** of the recipient
- **Closing: Yours sincerely + your full name**

Informal letters

- **Opening: Dear + the first name** of the recipient
- **Closing: Best regards/ kind regards + your first name**

Again looking at the different examples:

Example 1

- **Opening: Dear Jack,**
- **Closing: Kind regards, Jeremy**

Example 2

- **Opening: Dear Mr. Ortega,**
- **Closing: Yours sincerely , Jeremy**

Example 3

- **Opening: Dear Sir/Madam,**
- **Closing: Yours Faithfully, Jeremy Clarkson**

Now you know how to start your letter and finish it, next we will have a look at how to structure your letter.

How to structure your Letter

Formal/ semi-formal letter

Paragraph 1: start with **stating the purpose** of your letter.

Examples:

- I am writing this letter with regards to...
- I am writing to express my...
- I am writing to inform you...

Informal letters

Paragraph 1: First a greeting then state your purpose

Examples:

- How are you doing?
- I hope you are doing well.
- How have you been?

Looking at the 3 examples again we will get the following examples:

Example1

*I hope you are doing great. Thanks again **for wanting to take care of** everything, John. I really **felt so relieved when you stepped up to take care of** my place and my dog Fifi **when I'll be away on holidays** (All this is just a small informal introduction). **I just wanted to give you a small heads-up of** how you can help me **take care of** my house and Fifi (here you are more clearly stating the purpose of your letter).*

Example 2

I am writing to formally request to withdraw from two courses: Introduction to Elementary Education (EDU602) and Teaching Methods (EDU 619). (This clearly states the purpose of your letter)

Example 3

I am writing to request some information regarding the conference that is being arranged by your organisation next month. (Again, this clearly states the purpose of your letter)

You now have written your opening and your first paragraph, next is the **main body or the real content of the letter.**

Main body

There are different ways to structure the body of the task. You could **split up the different content points and put them each in a separate paragraph**. You could also just **group relevant information together in 2 or 3 paragraphs**. For the different examples there will be different structures:

Example 1

- *give contact details for when you are away*
- *give instructions about how to care for your pet*
- *describe other household duties*

The best way here is to **use 3 paragraphs to cover the 3 bullet points from the task**. You should also **think about some interesting and relevant details to enrich the content** of your letter.

- **Paragraph 2: contact details**
- **Paragraph 3: how to take care of your pet**
- **Paragraph 4: other things you want your friend to do at your place, like water the plants**

*As you already know I'll be away from the 16th till the 29th and I'll arrive back Sunday night. **In the meantime, if you need to ask anything** while I am gone, just send me a message either on WhatsApp or on Messenger. I'll have my phone with me, **just don't expect me to answer straight away**, I still want to enjoy my holidays and not spend too much time on my phone.*

*As for Fifi, she **doesn't really need that much care**. **Just make sure that** she gets her 3 meals a day. **You can find** all the dry food under the sink, just **fill up** her bowl and if there is still some food left, **no need to** add more. Also, please have a walk with her in the mornings and evenings, especially before going to bed, otherwise she might **wake you up** when she wants to go pee.*

***Apart from that could you please** water the plants, again not so much work, just once a week some water will do. Finally, I'll **be receiving some bills** (electricity, gas and internet), as I won't have access to my banking on holidays, **could you please** pay them. I left the money on the counter next to the small note with emergency contacts.*

Example 2

- **The content: explain you want to stop studying** because it is too much work as well as ask if it is possible to **get some money back**.

Since you have **2 parts** you would just use **2 paragraphs**:

- **Paragraph 2: explain you want to stop studying because it is just too much work**
- **Paragraph 3: ask for a refund**

*The main reason for reducing my course load is that I am finding it extremely difficult to manage 4 courses. In the beginning of the term, I was **perhaps overly optimistic about juggling** both my full-time studies and my part-time job (20 hours/week). Since I really have to work part-time **to support myself, I have no other choice but to decrease my course load. I am planning on** taking the two courses during the summer semester if available. **That way I will still be able to** complete all the courses for the degree program this year.*

*I would also like to request a tuition refund and **hope I am not too late to** receive the full reimbursement. I am really sorry for any inconvenience I may have caused by this change in plans. I just want to assure you that, this decision was not taken lightly, and I do appreciate the kind consideration you have shown me.*

Example 3

- **The content:** Ask information on **the dates, the program, the accommodation and the cost.**

Here you have **4 things** you need to ask information about, each of them are **not such a big items**. So, rather than use 4 very small paragraphs, it would be better to use just **2 paragraphs**.

I would still **use the same order and just group dates and program into 1 paragraph**. That way you can ask for the program on these dates, which fits in logically. **Next paragraph you could group the accommodation and cost together** and maybe ask if you need to book your own accommodation or if it is included in the price. This again is a logical connection to make.

Paragraph 2: Ask for information on the dates and program

Paragraph 3: Ask information on the accommodation and costs

First of all, I would like to ask about the exact dates of the seminar, as I couldn't seem to find this information myself. Additionally, could you tell me how many days it is and how many hours a day the seminar will run for? Secondly, I would also like to know the different topics that will be discussed, as well as a possible list of the guest speakers. Maybe it would be possible for you to send me the whole program, that way I can decide which lectures and workshops would fit me best.

Finally, I would also like to know more about the accommodation and the cost. I do not know if there will be separate packages or if everything will be included in the price. I ask, as my employer only has a limited budget for the seminar and I might have to pay for the extra costs. For this reason it would be really helpful if you could give me an overview of the different possibilities and prices.

After the main body it is time to finish your letter and write your conclusion.

Conclusion

Formal or semi-formal letters

Your conclusion should be **one of the following points**:

- **A call for action:** If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
- **Express thanks:** Thank you for your time and consideration.
- **Ask for a response:** I look forward to hearing from you.

Informal letters

- I can't wait to hear from you.
- I'm looking forward to seeing you soon.

Let's look at the different examples again

Example 1

Thanks again so much! I'm really looking forward to seeing you when I come back. I'll make sure to pick up some souvenirs for you.

Example 2

Thank you for your attention to these requests. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 645 433 145. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Example 3

It would be great if you can send me the requested details at the earliest date possible, preferably by the end of this week. Thank you again for your time and help and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Final review and correction

We all know you only have 20 minutes to write the whole letter and you do need some time to read the question, and think of some possible answers. Still, **you will need about 2 minutes at the end to review and correct your writing**. This is **extremely important** as it will give you the opportunity to **correct your mistakes** and maybe change some of the words you repeat for **synonyms**. This will help you **improve your accuracy** and with it **your overall score**. So, do take the time for this, these 2 minutes of your time **could make your overall score go up with 1 full point** (0.5 for accuracy and 0.5 for lexis)

Now let's put it all together and have a look at the 3 examples together:

Examples of General IELTS writing task 1 a letter

Example 1

Dear Jack,

*I hope you are doing great. Thanks again **for wanting to take care of** everything, John. I really **felt so relieved when you stepped up to take care of** my place and my dog Fifi **when I'll be away on holidays** (All this is just a small informal introduction). **I just wanted to give you a small heads-up of** how you can help me **take care of** my house and Fifi*

*As you already know **I'll be away from** the 16th till the 29th and I'll arrive back Sunday night. **In the meantime, if you need to ask anything** while I am gone, just send me a message either on WhatsApp or on Messenger. I'll have my phone with me, **just don't expect me to answer straight away**, I still want to enjoy my holidays and not spend too much time on my phone.*

*As for Fifi, she **doesn't really need that much care**. **Just make sure that** she gets her 3 meals a day. **You can find** all the dry food under the sink, just **fill up** her bowl and if there is still some food left, **no need to add more**. Also, **please have a walk with** her in the mornings and evenings, **especially before** going to bed, otherwise she might **wake you up** when she wants to go pee.*

***Apart from that could you please** water the plants, again not so much work, just once a week some water will do. Finally, **I'll be receiving some bills** (electricity, gas and internet), as I won't have access to my banking on holidays, **could you please** pay them. I left the money on the counter next to the small note with emergency contacts.*

*Thanks again so much! **I'm really looking forward to seeing you** when I come back and **I'll make sure to pick up** some souvenirs for you.*

Kind regards,

Jeremy

(314 words)

This example is double the word minimum of 150 words. **You are not expected to produce so much in so little time**, still the example gives you a **good idea of the overall structure**; some ideas about what to write; and **some really nice expressions/collocations** for your lexis.

As you can see **it is very similar to how you would write a letter or message to your friend in your language**. For this reason **do not make it too complicated**, just read the task and think **what would you write if you had to ask your friend to take care of your pet?**

The only difficulty could be issues with limited vocabulary you have to express yourself in English.

Example 2

Dear Mr. Ortega,

I am writing to formally request to withdraw from two courses: Introduction to Elementary Education (EE 305) and Teaching Methods (TM 101).

The main reason for reducing my course load is that I am finding it extremely difficult to manage 4 courses. In the beginning of the term, I was perhaps overly optimistic about juggling both my full-time studies and my part-time job (20 hours/week). Since I really have to work part-time to support myself, I have no other choice but to decrease my course load. I am planning on taking the two courses during the summer semester if available. That way I will still be able to complete all the courses for the degree program this year.

I would also like to request a tuition refund and hope I am not too late to receive the full reimbursement. I am really sorry for any inconvenience I may have caused by this change in plans. I just want to assure you that, this decision was not taken lightly, and I do appreciate the kind consideration you have shown me.

Thank you for your attention to these requests. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 645 433 145. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy

(217 words)

Again a nice example of how you would probably deal with the same situations. Like stated before, don't make it too difficult, think about the task, what the content is and who you are writing to.

Example 3

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to request some information regarding the conference that is being arranged by your organisation next month.

First of all, I would like to ask about the exact dates of the seminar, as I couldn't seem to find this information myself. Additionally, could you tell me how many days it is and how many hours a day the seminar will run for? Secondly, I would also like to know the different topics that will be discussed, as well as a possible list of the guest speakers. Maybe it would be possible for you to send me the whole program, that way I can decide which lectures and workshops would fit me best.

Finally, I would also like to know more about the accommodation and the cost. I do not know if there will be separate packages or if everything will be included in the price. I ask, as my employer only has a limited budget for the seminar and I might have to pay for the extra costs. For this reason it would be really helpful if you could give me an overview of the different possibilities and prices.

It would be great if you can send me the requested details at the earliest date possible, preferably by the end of this week. Thank you again for your time and help and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Faithfully,

Jeremy Clarkson

(239 words)

This final example again shows how you could possibly write a letter like this. Don't forget this is only 1 example, many different answers are possible. The important thing is to follow the structure and use some good lexis (vocabulary) to write your letter.

If you have any further questions [send us a comment](#) and we'll help you as much as possible.