

What's the Difference between a band 6.0 and 7.0 score in IELTS Speaking and Writing?

Hi, I'm Philip Lee. I have been an English teacher for over twenty years. I am the CEO at Phillip James, and enjoy running marathons, trail running, basically anything running related (something of a maniac). I say running a marathon teaches you a lot about challenges in life!

If you're planning to study, work, or live abroad sometime in the near future, it's highly likely you'll need to take something called the IELTS Test. Depending on what you want to do when you go overseas, you probably already know what score you need, and most likely it's either something called a Band 6.0, 6.5 or 7.0, maybe even a likely higher.

If you want to study abroad as part of an undergraduate programme, you'll probably need a 6.0, but the better universities ask you to have a band 6.5. If you're a postgraduate student or a skilled professional such as a doctor, it's highly likely you already know that you need a band 6.5 or 7.0. So, what do these scores mean? What do you have to do in order to get a band score of 6.0, 7.0 etc?

Let's look at how the IELTS test is assessed, and then what the differences are between scores from 6.0-7.0

How the IELTS Test is Assessed: English Language skills and Academic skills

By now, you should already know that the IELTS test focuses on the four skills, Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Listening. However, did you know that a large part of the test assesses your academic skills? (See next blog post)

Here's how the people at IELTS test your language and academic skills

The Speaking Test

The Speaking test has four areas of assessment:

- Fluency and Cohesion
- Lexical Resource
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy
- Pronunciation

Here's what you need to do for each of the following scores

IELTS Band 6.0 Speaking

- Fluency and Cohesion
 - You can talk without stopping for quite a while, but you don't always have the right language to express yourself clearly, so you get mixed up sometimes, repeat yourself, correct yourself a bit too much, and hesitate while speaking. This doesn't usually happen when you're talking about familiar topics, like family, free time activities, vacations, but more challenging topics, such as social issues; education, employment, health, can start to cause the issues mentioned above.
 - English relies a lot on words and phrases used to link ideas together, much more so than some other languages; phrases like *however*, *nevertheless*, *despite this*,

therefore, consequently, such as, for instance. This is the coherence part of Fluency and Coherence, and you'll need to be fairly good at using quite a few of these types of words, but sometimes you also make mistakes with them

- Lexical Resource
 - You should be able to talk about most everyday topics and provide a reasonably long answer. This should be almost the same for slightly more difficult topics, such as problems in society, but here you'll start to make mistakes, use words that are too formal or too informal, maybe even sometimes use a phrase that has a different meaning.
 - Sometimes there'll be an idea that you can't express as you'd like, so you use easier words and phrases; we sometimes call this paraphrasing.

- Grammatical Range and Accuracy
 - You should be able to use most of the grammar from a lower level grammar book quite well, with only a few mistakes.
 - You know some of the grammar from the higher level grammar books, but you can really only use a few grammatical structures, and most of the time you still make mistakes. However, the main point here is that people can still understand you.
 - If you're unsure of the different levels of grammar, check out the Essential Grammar in Use. You should be confident at completing the Elementary and Pre-Intermediate books, the Intermediate level book should be reasonably fine, but the Upper Intermediate book will be somewhat challenging for you at this stage.

- Pronunciation • uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control • shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained • can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times

- At band 6.0 level your pronunciation is generally fine, although, even if you're not aware of it yourself, you're still regularly making some mistakes.
- Whoever is listening to you can mostly understand what you are saying, but it's still common for people to actually not quite understand you. Have you ever had people ask you to repeat something, do people sometimes look a bit puzzled when you're talking to them? It may well be because of mistakes in your pronunciation.

IELTS Band 7.0 Speaking

- Fluency and Cohesion uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility
 - You should be able to talk for quite a while without any signs that it's difficult. In a band 6.0 answer you often get a bit mixed up, but not at a band 7.0, your answers should be clear and well organised.
 - On some of the more difficult questions you may still hesitate a little or correct yourself.
 - You should be good at using a range of linking words. Because this linguistic feature does not occur with the same frequency in certain languages, you might need to make a special effort to learn a lot more of these words than you appreciate. Check out (blog on academic English)
- Lexical Resource
 - You can talk about a wide variety of topics, with plenty of suitable words and phrases. Not only can you easily talk about familiar topics, such as family, sports, hobbies, but also issues such as health, the environment, globalisation, should also pose no real difficulty.

- The people at IELTS want you to show that you can use higher level phrases and something called idiomatic vocabulary. This doesn't mean just idioms, but things like phrasal verbs; jump in (start something), take off (start to be successful).
 - At band 7.0, you also need to show that you know something about style; can you successfully use less formal language when you need to, and then change it to more formal language when the idea you are discussing requires it? However, it's fine to make a few mistakes with this.
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy
 - My favourite thing here is a phrase which all my students get very nervous about, "*Frequently produces error-free sentences.*" That speaks for itself, right?
 - You should be able to use a wide range of grammatical structures from the higher level grammar books, such as Advanced Grammar in Use
 - However, even though you're generally good at grammar when you're at this level, you still regularly make a few mistakes, most likely with some of the notoriously difficult aspects of English grammar, such as articles; *a/an/the* and when to use them, or using a mix of complex structures, such as past perfect conditionals; *If I hadn't have met her in Paris, we wouldn't have been able to pick up the documents, which would've meant we wouldn't have been able to do the presentation later in Brussels.*
 - Pronunciation
 - People should be able to understand you quite easily. Although there might be one or two mistakes in your pronunciation.
 - There are some typical pronunciation features of English, you should know what these are and successfully be able to produce them. These can be different, depending on which English pronunciation you have, either slightly more North American, British, Australian, ect. Any form of accent is completely fine, but you should be consistent.

- Some typical pronunciation features are /th/, /l/ and /r/, /v/ and /b/, and linking sounds

The writing Test

It's quite common for people to think that the difference between 6.0 and 7.0 score for IELTS Writing is basically a difference in language level, better vocabulary and grammar. Yes, it's true you need to show a wider range of language, and at higher levels you're going to need to have fewer errors. But that's not the whole story. The writing test in IELTS requires you to show your academic skills, too. The first two assessment criteria, seen below, are focused much more on academic skills. ([blog link for academic skills](#))

The writing Test has four assessment criteria

- Task Response
- Cohesion and Coherence
- Lexical Resource
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Let's look at what you need to do for a band 6.0 in the IELTS Writing Test

IELTS Band 6.0 Writing

- **Task Response:** This is related to the way in which your ideas in your essays relate closely to the question. The ideas are the important aspect of this section.
 - The main thing here is that the question has a number of different parts, and you need to write about all of them in your essay; so if the question asks you to talk about advantages and disadvantages, then you need to talk about both. If the

question asks you to talk about the main features of a graph, then you should write about all the main features. However, for a band 6.0 you won't write as much as you should about some areas of the question; for example, if you write about the advantages and disadvantages of something, you won't write enough about either the advantages or the disadvantages. The problem is, you won't know this, which is why you'll get a band 6.0

- For Task Response, you need to show your conclusion, which is rather like your final opinion. For a band 6.0 this conclusion will not always be easy for the reader to understand.

- **Cohesion and Coherence**

- This is also more closely related to your academic skills. You need to organise your ideas in a way the examiners for IELTS would say is logical. From the beginning of your essay to the end, the ideas are organised properly.
- Just like in the Speaking test, you have to use linking words to join your ideas together, but you still make a few mistakes here. One of the main mistakes which makes your essay a band 6.0 is that you over-use phrases like *for example, because, and, so*.
- In the writing test, you are tested on your ability to use *referencing*. This is when you use a different word to refer to something said previously; *Vietnam* has a wonderful range of food. *It* has great vegetable dishes, as well as some great spicy food. *The country* also has amazing city architecture, and beautiful countryside. However, for a band 6.0 you're still making a number of mistakes in this area.

- **Lexical Resource** • uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication

- You can use a reasonably good range of vocabulary here, and you try to use some higher level vocabulary. The problem is, you are still making some mistakes.

- Your spelling is not always accurate, and you sometimes mix up nouns and adjectives, prefixes and suffixes; for instance, non-important (wrong), unimportant (correct)
- Although you're still making mistakes the reader can generally understand what you're trying to say.
- Grammatical Range and Accuracy
 - Just as in the Speaking Test, you use a mix of basic grammar as well as some more difficult, higher level grammar.
 - For a band 6.0 you don't need to be completely accurate with your grammar, it's fine to make some mistakes. So, if you need to achieve a band 6.0, it's a good idea to spend more time studying vocabulary, and developing your ideas for the Task Response section, rather than trying to get perfect grammar, as you don't actually need it.

IELTS Band 7.0 Writing

- Task Response
 - The first part of the assessment criteria tells us that for a band 7.0 the person, "*addresses all parts of the task*". This can be quite hard to understand at first, but basically, unlike in a band 6.0 essay, where you may talk about certain parts of the question more than others, in a band 7.0 essay, you'll talk about all areas of the task as appropriate. Of course, knowing what that means is the tricky part.
 - When you have an essay question, think carefully about how much needs to be written about each area of the question.
 - If you're lucky enough to have a teacher who can check your essays, and knows about IELTS, they'll tell you whether or not you're appropriately answering all parts of the question.

- It doesn't take long to figure out how to do this, and having received feedback on five or six essays, you should get the hang of it.
- You also need to have a clearly identifiable position throughout your essay. This is similar to a clear opinion. You should ask some friends to read through your essays and ask them if they can clearly understand what you want to say. If you get some positive feedback, you're probably doing well.
- The next issue for achieving a band 7.0 in IELTS Writing, is that you have to be able to present a developed argument. This means supporting your main ideas with appropriate examples, reasons, etc. A general rule of thumb on this is that, for the most part, try not to explain your ideas, more, try to illustrate your ideas with examples. Lengthy explanations with few examples are more of a band 6.0 level.
- In relation to the last point made above, it is acceptable to be a little less clear in focus or to over-generalize. This means it's likely some of your ideas are not as closely related to the question as you might think or that the ideas you present are a bit too broad. Being very clear and specific is going to move you towards an even higher score.

● Cohesion and Coherence

- One of the most important points to understand about getting a band 7.0 in IELTS Writing is that you need to know how to organise your ideas very logically. If you have an essay that contains three or four main ideas that you want to discuss, be sure to know why you present them in the order in which you do actually present them. If you look back at any previous essays you've written, ask yourself about this: why are the ideas in the order in which you present them? If you don't know or can't see any reason for the order in which they are presented, you've probably written something closer to a band 6.0 IELTS essay.
 - A quick solution for organising your ideas; they should form a funnel shape. From largest, most important, to the smallest or least important. However, be careful, this should not be just your opinion, the ideas should easily be identifiable as forming a funnel shape from anyone who reads your essay.

- For a band 7.0 IELTS band score you also need to pay close attention to your paragraphs. Each paragraph must have a clear, central topic, which is closely related to the question of the essay. Again, this can't just be your opinion. If you were to have your essay read by lots of people, they should all be able to agree on the central point of each paragraph, and whether it is closely related to the essay question.
 - Finally, as with the IELTS Speaking Test, the people at IELTS want to see that you can use a good range of linking words. You don't need a lot, but as a rule, you'll need to use about two or three per paragraph, although the IELTS guys tell you that at band 7.0 you might under or over use some of these. So, watch out, try to use *such for instance, an example of this is*, instead of just *for example*.
- **Lexical Resource:** this is basically the same as for the IELTS Speaking Test
 - You need to be able to write about a wide variety of topics, with plenty of suitable words and phrases; issues such as health, the environment, globalisation, should also pose no real difficulty.
 - The people at IELTS want you to show that you can use higher level phrases and something called idiomatic vocabulary. This doesn't mean just idioms, academic phrases, slightly formal idiomatic phrases; *one might suggest that, ...is not exactly unheard of*.
 - At band 7.0, you also need to show that you know something about style; can you successfully use less formal language when you need to and academic? However, it's fine to make a few mistakes with this.
 - You are allowed to make one or two mistakes with spelling, the choice of words, which might be slightly wrong, such as too informal, or not used for the particular context you're writing about.
- **Grammatical Range and Accuracy:** this is also basically the same as band 7.0 IELTS Speaking criteria

- “*Frequently produces error-free sentences.*” Look at the essays you’re currently writing, even if your teacher is helping you with the structure of your essay, politely ask them if they could highlight all your grammatical errors, just for you to see if your essays have frequently error-free sentences.
- You should be able to use a wide range of grammatical structures from the higher level grammar books, such as Advanced Grammar in Use
- However, even though you’re generally good at grammar when you’re at this level, you still regularly make a few mistakes, most likely with some of the notoriously difficult aspects of English grammar, such as articles; *a/an/the* and a few punctuation mistakes, such as commas before or after linking phrases.

Finally, whatever the score you need in IELTS Writing and Speaking, an important point is not to spend time on areas of study that are not required for your score. Spending a little more time understanding the above criteria and differences will save you much much more time later, and allow you to focus specifically on the areas of language and academic skills you need to achieve your score.

Good luck!