# IELTS Podcast

**Lesson 272**
**IELTS WRITING**

**Assessment criteria for the IELTS writing test**

**Female Voice:** You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

## INTRODUCTION

**Ben:** IELTS writing test assessment criteria. Hi there. My name is Ben Worthington. In this tutorial, we will specifically look at the **assessment criteria for the IELTS writing test**; the four components and how to use it in your study sessions.

This is going to help you with your IELTS journey because one, if you understand the criteria-- no, let's rephrase that. **When you understand the criteria inside out, you can prepare for the exam more effectively. In essence, you can work smarter rather than harder and the second reason, it will help you is because-- well, I'm going to break them all down.**

I'll break it all down into the four components and I'll be giving you tips along the way. These tips are from ex-IELTS examiners, current examiners, successful students, and also, of course, methods that we've used in the online course that we have at ieltspodcast.com and methods that I have used when I have been teaching for IELTS.

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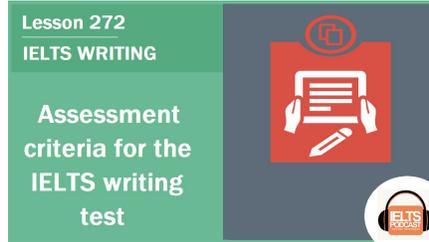
As you all hopefully know, I'm a very results orientated person. So, I'll only do something if I know that I can get the results. Data-driven could be a good way of summing that up. Let's jump into this.

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## FOUR COMPONENTS OF IELTS EXAM

So, you hopefully know that we've got four components to this IELTS exam, to the IELTS. We've got **task achievement**, **task response**, **coherence and cohesion**, **grammatical range and accuracy**, or we could just say **grammar and lexical resource** or we can also just say **vocabulary**.

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## TASK ACHIEVEMENT and TASK RESPONSE

Let's jump into **Task Achievement, Task Response**. So, there are two tasks in the IELTS writing test. One is aimed at task achievement and task 2 at task response. So, the general and academic versions of IELTS they differ. So, for part 1 in the general, we're going to write a letter.

Now, this is quite easy. Well, I think it's easy because you've got the whole structure laid out in front of you and you will need to one, explain why you are writing the letter. Then there's

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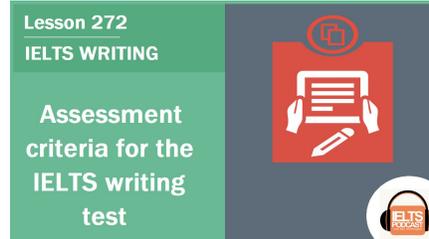criteria for the
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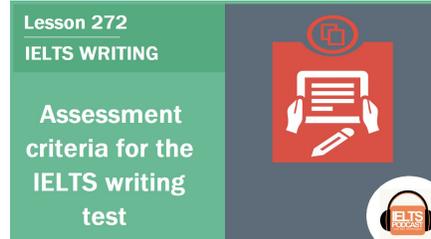
usually three prompts. **You must answer all of these and it's probably a good idea to assign a paragraph for each of the prompts.**

Then probably the most important is the **tone of the register**. So, if it's a formal letter, for example, a letter of complaint, a job application letter, or I don't know, a letter to a newspaper, then you will have to use the right register, use the right language, the **formal language**. However, if it's for a friend, then you use probably an **informal tone** and you'll be using words like hey, how's things going? Just contractions and more like spoken text.

Now, the tricky thing I find is the neutral, the **neutral style** and this might be when you are writing to a colleague. For example, an email to a work colleague. When you are writing neutral, you need to find a balance between formal and informal. It's not a challenge, but you do have to be aware. You have to bring it up a level, but you also need to avoid using the very formal phrases such as Dear Sir or Madam. I've gone into this in more tutorials in the past. In fact, there's a whole tutorial about it.

Next one, **part 1 for the academic test you have to describe a table, chart, diagram, graph, or a flowchart.** I said that already. Now, this is a challenge because you need to summarize it logically, you need to pinpoint, i.e. identify the main features and you have to give an overview. So, you make sure you've included the appropriate data and then any significant trends.

Now, **one tip to do this is to look at the chart and slightly blur your eyes so you can only get a rough outline and then you want to get the key features from that rough outline.** Now, the

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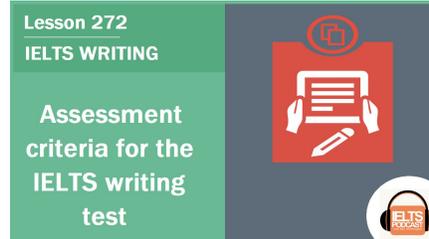Click here for IELTS Materials (free)

language we need here is quite straight forward and definitely worth mastering. For example, we should be able-- we should have a solid control of comparisons; larger than the third quarter by over 50%.

We should have a very thorough understanding of the language of change and this is quite popular with IELTS students. So, we should be writing things like shot up dramatically or reached a peak in 1995. This kind of language if it's a dynamic line chart, of course. Also, if it's a pie chart we should have a thorough understanding of the segments; a half, a third, a quarter, a fifth.

What I think is definitely useful for all parts of academic task 1 is the ability to write in a fancy interesting way. By this I mean we can use phrases such as I don't know, the chip-- I don't know. Let's see. The production of barley increased three-fold over the two decades. So, not only did I say three-fold, which is quite an advanced structure but also instead of saying over the twenty years, I used two decades. You see?  What I'm doing is introducing a lot of variety and this will help me improve my grammatical range and accuracy.

Also, just one last thing here before we move on to writing test part 2. With academic task 1, you do not want to list every single data point. **You want to be giving an overview**. So, we include the **maximums, the minimums, and the exceptions.** Just bear that in mind. That's probably the biggest takeaway I can give you for the academic task 1.
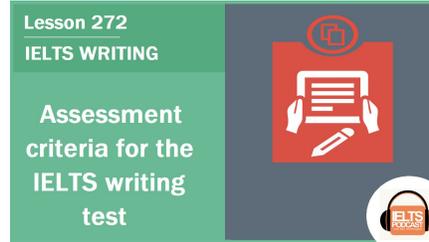
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We go into this into a lot of detail in the **Academic task 1 course**. We talk about what information to include, what tenses to include, the grammatical structures that I talked about; three times larger, grew by five-fold, all these kind of stuff.

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## WRITING PART 2

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Let's move on to writing part 2. Now, as I've said a million times before, the writing test is a reading test and the speaking test is a listening test. By this, I mean that you really need to **comprehend**. You really need to understand what the question is asking. With regards to task response or task achievement, sorry, this is basically answering the question that's in front of you.

So, here's a typical question. **Researching one's family tree is becoming a popular trend. Why do you think that this is so? Is this a positive or negative trend?** In that question, there are two parts and you must address those both-- you must address them both. You cannot make a list. You cannot use headings. You cannot use bullet points. You have to introduce each idea then back it up with supporting evidence and then ideally use reasoning and evidence and examples to support your claim. And you do this for each paragraph.

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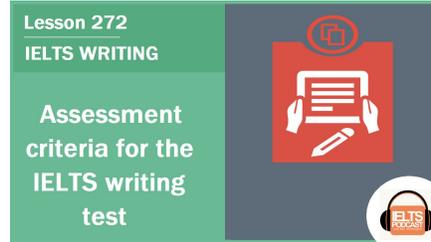**Assessment criteria for the IELTS writing test**

Now, what's really confusing for students is they don't know if they got the right answer or the wrong answer. And the way you can tell if you've got a right answer or a wrong answer-- actually, that's the wrong question to ask. What you need to be asking is do I have a developed, strong, logically sound argument?

I'm not going to go into it in much detail now, but it's not the case of yes or no. It's not like mathematics where you've got a right answer or a wrong answer. Here, what the examiner is testing or the IELTS examiner is testing is your ability to communicate an argument in a logical, coherent fashion. In a logical fashion with strong arguments and backing it up with appropriate points.

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## COHERENCE AND COHESION

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Now, this moves us on to **coherence and cohesion**. Now, **coherence is the logical sequence of thoughts and ideas.** Let me just repeat that. Coherence is the logical sequence of thoughts and ideas. Now, your reader must be able to follow your ideas and I'll give you an example. If you're writing your essay and an idea comes in-- if you're writing your body paragraph and an idea just pops into your mind, there is very high chance that that doesn't follow the logical sequence of arguments in your paragraph.

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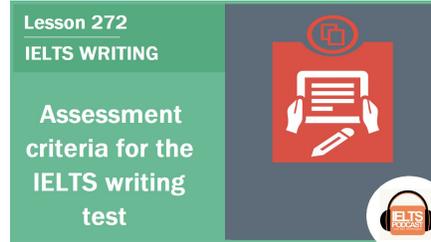Click here for IELTS Materials (free)

Another tip here is that we usually go from general down to the details. So, if we're talking about the family tree, we might start off by talking about it is a popular-- it's probably a popular trend because of the rise of immigration and people might want to know their origins. So, that's like our topic sentence and then what we're going to do is just build this up.

So, we might say this is especially the case if a person is living in a country where they might not feel at home or if anti-immigration policies are starting to take hold. For example, in Austria, a far-right party almost came to power blah, blah, blah. You go into more detail there and you back up what you just said, but in a more detailed fashion.

I'm not going to-- for example, I build that whole paragraph and then I have an idea that talks about-- I don't know, a footballer in the UK who traced his past-- who traced his family tree. I'm not going to mention that at all in that paragraph because it just seems sort of like a little bit disjointed. If you're a very good writer, you might be able to weave it in, but when you're planning, this is when you want to weave it in. Anyway, I'm going into too much detail now.

So, let's just have a look at a summary of coherence. So, you must be able to structure your answer, make logical use of paragraphs, your essay should start with an introduction and this is the same with the paragraph. You should have your topic sentence at the beginning there giving an overview of what you will write about.

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Inside that paragraph, the ideas follow each other and inside-- Sorry, inside the essay, it's sort of an overview and all the ideas ideally will follow and be joined together as well. Just one final thing, obviously, we end with a conclusion.

As a side note as well, generally speaking, **I try to avoid adding any new information in the conclusion**. I'll just say that again. **I avoid adding any new information in the conclusion and I do that just because I don't want to get distracted.** I want to be clear. I want to be concise. I don't want to risk it.

Sometimes I will encourage a student to write a sentence about the future just so we can squeeze in the future tense, but it's only sort of like an afterthought. It's not like a whole new argument. It's just a very mild afterthought and basically just an excuse to use the future tense. So, anyway-- also just one last thing while we are talking about coherence. We do not want to introduce our ideas just like, we need to transition between ideas.

Now then, I'll give you an example. We have the question: **It is important to preserve local languages. Do you agree or disagree?** Here is the incorrect way. We say agree. We should do this to preserve the culture. It doesn't work, does it? Here's the correct version. The preservation of local languages is essential to the protection of the culture of the region. Can you see? It's much smoother. It's not disjointed.

Let's have a quick look at **cohesion**. I kind of mentioned it briefly before. Hopefully, you heard that. I'm sure you did. When we're talking about linking ideas, we're talking about cohesion. So,

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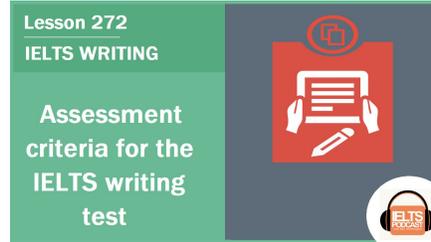
we need to use connective devices or linkers and a few of these might be **however, whereas, on the contrary, while**, and these are all used to contrast ideas. In my opinion, these are the best to contrast ideas especially if you're doing academic task 1 because we can use whereas, while, on the contrary for academic task 1 because we need to be showing an overview and we can transition between data points. Whereas barley production in 2010 was at 50 tons for France, in Germany, it reached 70 tons in the same year.

You see? It's a very effective way and a very effective tool for academic task 1. Side note: don't use however though because however is more for arguments whereas whereas, on the contrary, and while and there are a few others, these are more used to contrast ideas.

Now then, if you want to explain a concept, we can say this is to say or nevertheless. If we want to explain a concept, we can say this is to say and what-- is it similar to illustrate? We can just explain a concept further. Now, if we want to give an example, which I think is definitely a good idea, we can say to illustrate this, for instance, for example.

Then the final ones, we can say in addition, additionally, furthermore and these are all words that we can use to build up our argument, add supporting ideas. Now then, cohesion and coherence will be marked according to your ability to logically organize the sentences and paragraphs.
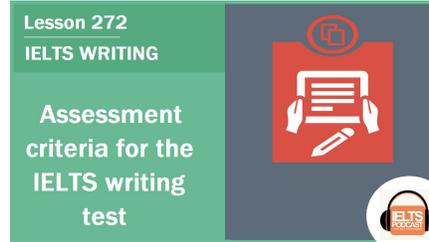
As I've said before, **use these linking devices to connect your ideas, to connect sentences.** The idea is that they all flow together and as I mentioned before, random ideas that pop into your
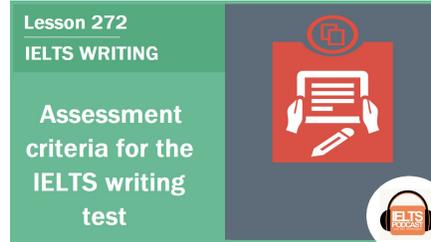
head are usually best discarded. The **idea generation part** is what you do at the beginning when you are analyzing the question or in academic task 1 when you're planning your essay, when you're planning what you're going to write about. Then it's a case of transferring your ideas and your plan and your map into a coherent essay.

This is exactly what we teach and this is exactly what gets us results on the **online course**. You plan first and then you transition into writing and just by breaking it down into its smaller components, it becomes much, much easier to tackle. We break down the question into its key points and then we generate ideas and then we map the ideas into the formula that we've got; the sentence guide formula or the C2 template. Then we transition those ideas over into a strong coherent essay.

Right then-- sorry, I got a bit excited there, but I do enjoy that process. Let's see. I enjoy it because it's so refreshing. Once you break it down into the smaller parts, it makes it so much easier. It just makes it straightforward and if you do it a lot, it becomes automatic. So, as soon as you see the question, boom, you know exactly what to do. You know the procedure to follow. Okay, we're coming towards the end. Well, we're halfway through.
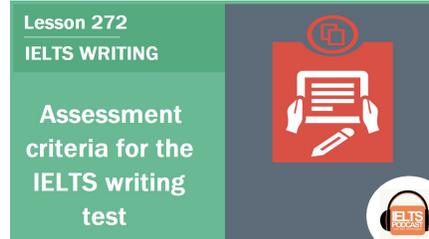
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**GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**

**Grammatical range and accuracy.** Now, this is such an important point and I think-- I don't think actually. I know this is absolutely the **most important point** because if you've got poor grammar, there's no way that the examiner is going to be able to understand if your essay is coherent, if you have fulfilled task response or task achievement requirements and there's no way that they're going to really be able to decipher the vocabulary that much because they don't know how that vocabulary has been used because the grammar is a mess. You see?

So, with this and I think a lot of students they just prefer to focus on the essay structure or they think they are not getting an IELTS band 7 or 8 or 9 because they don't know how to do task 2. In my experience, it's usually been a combination of them both, but the student has been focusing on essay structure, on essay-- on a five-paragraph essay instead of a four-paragraph essay and all of this and really what it comes down to is grammar.
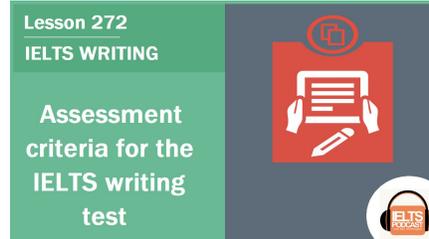
So, do not neglect the grammar and let's see. **To improve with your grammar the fastest way and this has been the case for years since the beginning of writing. The fastest way to improve it is to get feedback.** So, you need to know exactly where you are losing points. This is very important and this goes back to what I was saying before about breaking it down into its smaller components.

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**You need to find where you are losing the points.** It's possibly the use of articles. It's probably as well third-person singular or it might be the use of the passive, but the use of articles is a very common error, a very common pain point for students. Anyway, you need to find out which part you are losing points on and then jump online, find the theory then do some online quizzes and bring yourself up to scratch that means bring yourself up. Improve your level in that by doing online quizzes, reviewing the rules and then writing another essay and getting more feedback.

So, let's just go back to the IELTS. So, for a high score in grammatical range and accuracy, we need to be using correct sentences and combinations. We need to be using both the **active and the passive voices** in appropriate situations. We need to be using **modal auxiliary words**; the **do, the don't or the do not**. We also need to be using the **modal verbs should, could, would**. We also need to be using **comparatives** which I stressed about before; **conditionals** and of course, **appropriate punctuation**.

Now then, just one last thing here. **It's also important to combine complex and simple sentences and a very common area where I see students losing a lot of points is that they go for overly complex ideas or overly complex grammatical structures.** This is very risky because as I've said before if your grammar isn't good, it really makes it hard to understand what you're saying, which can negatively affect your other areas.
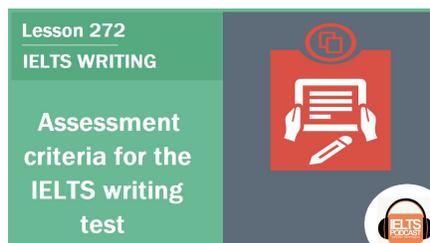
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So, I encourage students to **use complex sentences**. This may sound just a complete contradiction to what I said a few seconds ago, but I encourage them to use complex sentences only and when they have mastered that structure.

So, you find a structure that you like and then you go back and you do this and you learn it and you maybe change the nouns or you maybe slightly modify the adjectives, but you've got a structure that you know inside out. **The Sentence Guide is full of these structures that we encourage the students to master and then they can use them powerfully in their essays.**

Also, simple sentences are powerful as well. By simple sentences probably we're talking about shorter sentences. So, you need to be using a whole mixture of short, medium, and long sentences. This is how we get the balance.

You've probably heard me talk about this in the past where I said an essay with short sentences will sound really choppy. An essay with long sentences is really difficult to understand usually, so a lot of readers strain because you've got to hold the information in your head until you can complete the end of the sentence. If you do that for the whole essay, it makes it tiresome especially if you've got a sprinkling of grammar mistakes in there as well.

Now then, I think I've pretty much covered grammar there. I do get excited about this because it's one of those key areas of leverage. If you can get a good control of your grammar, everything else becomes instantly easier.

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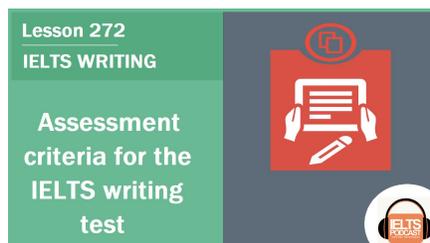
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Also, a good control of grammar sets you up for the future. What I mean is if you can attain a good solid use of grammar, it's going to help you with your university application, your life in university, a job application, immigration papers, a medical report, whatever. it's just going to be one of those life skills.

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## LEXICAL RESOURCE

Let's move on. **Lexical resource**: this is probably a favorite for students. In my opinion, this is-- I think it's another key leverage point. Working on this will definitely improve your score as well as grammar, but I think is a quick way to upgrade your score because it's much faster to change your words in your essay than it is to learn the whole grammatical rules.

Of course, what we're talking about here is like a short-term fix that might be able to push you up half a band score. However, I don't recommend a short-term effort. I recommend taking your time, but you should look at lexical resource, obviously, but look at it in sort of like equal proportions to the rest of the other factors.

So, **for the lexical resource, we need to demonstrate a broad vocabulary**. We need to **use more formal words.** We cannot use a spoken language that much. A good way to do this-- there are two good ways. **One is collocations that I've been harping on about for years and**

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**now I'm seeing more examiners**-- sorry, more IELTS tutors harping on about collocations, but when I started I don't think I saw that many people talking about it.

Collocations are fantastic. **They make you sound more natural especially if we're talking about topic-specific collocations**. These are just beautiful. In our essay correction course, in the online course where **we offer essay corrections** as well as part of the course, for the essays, **we give the students lists of collocations that they can incorporate into their writing**. So, you can instantly upgrade your writing.

Now then, these are good for your spoken English and for your written English, but of course, you need to determine which is the appropriate use. For example, you do not want to be sounding too formal for your spoken test and likewise, you don't want to be using informal collocations for your essay. For example, you don't want to say in the conclusion: I'm going to just say one last thing. That's just too informal. So, be careful then.

Use the collocations, research them and a good way that I have discovered probably about two weeks ago is called the gold list method. This is very useful. Takes about three or four weeks to get it up and running and we're going to have a specialist in the gold list method. It looks very promising, but before we do this, I personally want to use it and test it and then if it's good I will share it.

I'm going to get the expert on anyway, but I just think it'll be a better episode, a better tutorial if I'm actually practicing what I'm preaching which is what I strongly believe in. So, just one last
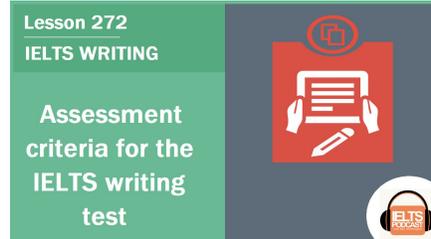
thing before we move on. For lexical resource, a very quick and powerful way to improve your score is once you've finished writing your essay, you go through it and you look at ways to upgrade certain terms, certain words and you research them as well.

So, for example, if you say something like it's bad for the environment. How could we upgrade that? Well, **instead of saying bad for the environment we say it's detrimental to the environment**. You see? Just little things like this and if we stack them, if we do it constantly, then we're stacking the deck in our favor.

That just means that we're going to get a 5% improvement here, a 5% improvement there, a 5% improvement there, a 5% improvement there and by the end of it we've got maybe a 20%-30% improvement just by adopting little points of leverages, little practices, little habits like this. If we do it constantly, we're going to vastly improve our score.

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## ONLINE COURSE

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This is why during the **online course**, we are constantly giving you little tips like this. Check your work before you do it. See if you can upgrade your language. Write in this style and slowly but surely, we build your essay writing capability. We improve your essay writing capability. Also, you've got to bear in mind that you're getting a lot of feedback as you're progressing through

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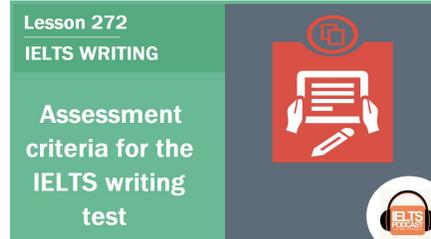
the course. So, you write an essay, send it in, you get it back with all the corrections, with some help, with some advice and this way it's just a fast powerful way to improve.

Now then, that's everything from me today. I hope you enjoyed this tutorial. If you did, **please give us five stars on the iTunes or on the iTunes store or whichever app you are listening to us with. Five stars for maximum review would be very good.** If you're going to leave a negative one, please don't. I'm just joking, but give us a full honest review. I'll be very grateful for that. **Once you've done that, tell Nadyne, the girl on our team and she'll be able to sort you out with a surprise.**

Also, if you know anybody who is struggling with IELTS, please tell them to get in contact. Send them this podcast. Hopefully, we can help them too. One last thing, if you are struggling-- there's two things actually. One, come and ask us for help. We would love to help you or maybe even just send us your essay. We can correct it. Go to the **online course** that we've got at IELTS podcast or the **essay correction service** that we've got at ieltspodcast.com and we're here to help you.

Also, **sign up for the email list**. We do special offers there. We offer special tutorials and as you probably know, we've interviewed students who have passed using the tips from the emails that we send out as well.

So, that's everything from me. Keep your chin up. Keep studying. Remember habits; a studying habit is much more powerful than "binge-ous" studying. So, try and make a promise; an hour a

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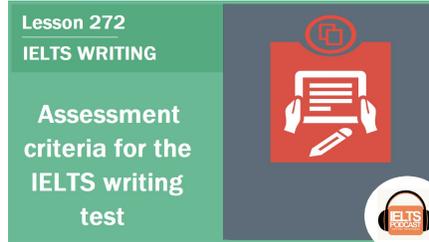
day, 30 minutes a day, podcast a day, whichever you find most adapts-- is most suitable for your lifestyle. So, that's everything. I'm finally going to go now. All the best and good luck with your IELTS preparation.

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