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**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:** Band 9 essay writing. In this tutorial, **we are going to look at what the examiner takes into account when evaluating your essay.** We're going to also look at what you need to take into account when you're planning or when you're writing your [band 9 essay](#) and I'm going to give you some practical advice along the way as we work through this tutorial.

As I've said in [previous tutorials](#), to get the most out of this you can 1) transcribe it and you can compare it with the transcriptions we've got in the IELTS podcast apps. 2) You could write a summary or you could just make notes just to switch it from passive listening to active listening. The third thing you can do is summarize those notes. So, you make a summary of this tutorial and maybe you can post it underneath in the comments section on the blog at [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com).

The final thing that you can do and probably the most powerful is decide on one of these pieces of advice. Choose one and then implement that instead of trying to implement all eight of them



that we've got, choose one, implement it, make it part of your process. Automate it so it becomes automatic every time you do it and then work on the next one.

Just by breaking it down into small components, it makes it a lot easier. So, perhaps this could be the biggest takeaway. Just choose one. Adopt one of these-- one of the points start incorporating it and then come back to your notes and adopt another one otherwise it's very easy to get overwhelmed and when we're overwhelmed, it makes it much harder to start struggling-- not start struggling. We don't want to start struggling. Makes it much harder to get started and getting started is probably the most important part.

### **UPGRADE YOUR ESSAY TO ACADEMIC ENGLISH**

Getting started, taking that first step. It's a bit like dominoes. We've all probably seen the tutorial-- not tutorial-- the YouTube video where one small domino can end up toppling all the rest of the dominoes because the dominoes get bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger each time. Each size of the domino gets bigger and just by tapping that first one, which is small and it's easy to do then it taps the next one which is slightly bigger and they get progressively bigger



and before you know it, it's like a 500 kilogram Domino that gets toppled just because of that first one that got toppled. So, this is the best way to look at it take one adopt it.

Now, let's jump straight into this before we get started-- what is happening today? It's one of those days. Let's jump straight into this. What is the examiner looking for? Well, as the question states, it says your personal views and ideas about the topic. This is very important because it doesn't mean to write in a personal fashion as in I'm thinking that climate change is bad thing, yes?

We've got to upgrade it. We've got to upgrade it to academic English, but you've got to express your personal views using academic English. We normally express personal views in an informal way because they're personal. With the IELTS essay, it's a bit trickier and we've got to show our personal views in an academic fashion and they must be about the topic. I'll go on about this in more detail in a few minutes, but what we're saying here is that they should also be fully extended. This means that there should be nothing else to develop on the issue.

Now, this might sound a little bit vague. It basically means that regarding the question we've answered everything that the question has asked us to. Also with our writing, we haven't sort of like started another angle and not finished that angle, yes? It's all developed and it's all complete. It's a fully developed essay. It's fully extended.



## GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY AND VOCABULARY RANGE

The second point **the examiner is looking for** is [grammatical accuracy](#) and [vocabulary range](#). So, you've got to be precise with your grammar and your vocabulary. I've seen many essays where the vocabulary wasn't the perfect word. It just didn't really fit in. It could have been grammatically perfect, but it didn't really fit the-- it didn't sound natural.

Also, it's got to be advanced. This is what I've spoken about in previous tutorials. By advanced, a good way-- a good indicator to check if your grammar and vocabulary is advanced is to check in the Cambridge dictionary. Just put in that word and next to the word, you'll see is it B2? Is it B1? Is it C1? Is it C2? Advanced vocabulary will have a little blue circle next to it which says C1 or C2 or B1 or B2. We're looking for C1 and C2.

Another good technique to improve your [vocabulary](#) is, as I've said go to [theeconomist.com](#). I think it's called [economist.com](#) sorry [economist.com](#), Guardian or even find academic reports and circle and just extract vocabulary and make your own vocabulary lists.



## ESSAY STRUCTURE

The next thing the examiner is looking for is **whether the [essay structure](#) is correct and nothing is missing**. By **essay structure** we mean it should have an **introduction, at least two paragraphs and these two paragraphs should expand and support the ideas in the introduction and summary paragraph**. That's quite straightforward. It's quite straightforward to say but to put into practice, it takes quite a few attempts to make sure that it's all cohesive.

The cohesive devices that we use they should be seamless and they shouldn't draw any attention to themselves. Now, this is a very difficult-- it's not very difficult, but it does take a lot of practice. Furthermore, while we're talking about cohesion, the ideas should be perfectly linked.

For example, if we're talking about climate change, ideally the two examples maybe or the two ideas we get might be related to this-- should be related to the same topic. So, if we're talking about [climate change](#) and then we're talking about coal mining and the pollution, then it would probably not-- it would probably be a bad idea to then switch and start talking about plastics in the ocean, okay? I mean it's under the same kind of topic, but it's not exactly there, yes?



A smarter idea would have been to talk about solar panel because with them we're talking about energy or electricity generation. Energy we're talking about basically. So, let's keep that whole paragraph about energy. Let's not talk about security issues, geopolitical security issues, about buying coal or oil from other countries. No. Let's just try and keep it all related to energy generation if we're talking about climate change.

## PARAGRAPHING

Next point: **paragraphing is logical**, okay? You're paragraphing needs to be logical and the ideas within the paragraph need to be logically arranged. For example, if I'm talking about using coal power stations, first, I'll mention that and then I might talk about the consequences of these coal power generation stations; power stations basically. I'm not going to talk about the pollution and then talk about power generation because first, we generate the power then we get the pollution. So, this is an example of how we can make the ideas logical.

Once again, this may sound a little bit daunting, but it does get easier and the key here is to have a solid plan at the beginning. We're going to go into this more in the next part. So, make



sure that you do have a good understanding of the topic and this goes back to what we've said in previous tutorials about reading.

A good way to identify whether you've got a solid understanding of the topics is to look at past questions and then see if you can generate ideas about these past questions. If you can generate ideas, excellent. If you can generate solid ideas with convincing facts and convincing evidence to support these ideas, then fantastic.

If not, then while you're looking at all these questions and if you find a topic where your mind goes blank, then you know the procedure. We jump online and we start reading about it and we start summarizing articles about it. We start collecting vocabulary articles about it so the next time we see that topic, we know what to do.

## FORMAL WRITING

Final point about what the examiner is looking for. Obviously, we're looking for formal writing; English for academic purposes. So, that means no contractions. It means real-world examples. We can't talk about our uncle who worked in a power station. We have to talk about the



workforce that were employed at the power station and subsequently, were diagnosed with lung disease, for example.

If we've got examples about our uncle or a friend and stuff like that, what we need to do is transform them into more academic-sounding examples and there's a full tutorial about that in the [online course](#) and likewise, when you start our online course, you have to generate ideas for lots of essays and send them in because what we're doing there is we are looking for weak spots in your idea generation engine, so to speak.

By doing it this way, we identify the weak spots. We've got questions for you from every single topic, past IELTS essay official questions and we ask you to generate ideas for each of those questions. This way, we can be sure that you're going to be going into the exam and you're not going to be surprised by any question that comes in front of you. That's just one way of how we get you fully prepared.

**READ THROUGH PAST BAND 9 ESSAYS**





Next point: some key points if you are aiming for a band 9. Now, a band 9 is quite difficult, okay? We're talking C2 or higher-- C2 level or higher. However, these points that I'm going to share with you they are still incredibly valuable if you're going for a 7, if you're going for a 7.5, 8, 8.5.

Now then, as I said before you want to get every single topic covered. This includes climate change. This includes education. This includes transport. All of these topics and you need to fill your brain up with ideas about every single topic. 2) Practice your writing. This is of course, quite straightforward, but not only get the practice of like writing out the essays, okay? Think about how to express your ideas so that they mean what you intend to say, yes?

A good technique to get to do this is to read through past band 9 essays-- some sample essays, copy them out pen for paper and steal structures and steal ideas, okay? Then you can drop your ideas and your thoughts into those structures. Obviously, you need to do this quite a few times to get used to the structures and then you can start bending them and playing with them and so on and so forth. Also, this will help you improve your confidence and it's going to obviously expand your range of your vocabulary and the range of your grammatical structures.



Next, make notes about what you're going to write about. This is quite straightforward especially for students in the online course who are studying with us at the moment. Daphne has said the same. We both recommend you brainstorm the topic and you then assign priorities for different ideas.

Don't be afraid of throwing some ideas out. What I like to do when I'm writing an IELTS essay is if there is a good structure or an idiomatic phrase that I think wow! This is wonderful. This is going to pick up some points. I'll write it down and then I'll try and maybe organize the essay around that or organize the paragraph around that idea or around that phrase. I found that this worked really well, but also I found that sometimes it can pull me off-topic.

This goes back to what I've been saying these in [previous tutorials](#). You need to find out what works for you. I remember one student actually and he was talking about a phrase that he really wanted to use in his [IELTS speaking](#), but he never got the chance. So, he didn't force it. He just took it on the chin, so to speak. Don't force it in the end, but still if that idea comes to you, write it down and see if you can adapt either that phrase for your writing or adapt the paragraph for that phrase.



## GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OR IDIOM

Next point: you should absolutely be sure of the meaning of every word, [grammatical structure](#) or idiom that you use and we're talking 100% sure if we're aiming for band 9. That level of confidence can come down the lower down we go with the band scores. So, if you are 90% confident about your work, then you probably-- maybe you'll get a band 7, band 8. If you're 50% confident, then you're going to be getting a much, much less-- a much, much lower score.

Now, this reminds me of a very important point. I think the most important point in what I just said was you need to be absolutely sure of your grammatical structures because without coherent strong and correct grammatical structure, it's very difficult to understand what you as the writer are trying to communicate.

So, I always prioritize grammar over any other part because if your grammar is a train crash, then the examiner cannot understand whether you're writing about the topic or whether your writing is coherent because it's just incomprehensible. This is why getting feedback is insanely important and it's the fastest way to improve.

One last point about this-- just to summarize it, sorry. So, be certain that you know the meaning of your idioms, words, your vocabulary, your grammatical structures especially the grammar.



Last point-- it kind of contradicts what I was saying a few seconds ago that try to avoid impressing the examiner with fancy phrases, okay? So, there's a balance here. If you do want to really use a fancy phrase to impress the examiner, be 100% confident that you're using it correctly.

Don't gamble on this because this is your money that's on the roulette table, so to speak or that's on the blackjack table. It's your money that you're gambling by thinking that this phrase I'm not 90% certain that I'm using it correctly. No. Don't do that. Do all your testing or your gambling when somebody else is looking at your work, not the examiner.

For example, when I was correcting essays-- I still do it every now and again, but I noticed that one student really wanted to use this phrase because they used it in about three essays. So, I was like okay, research how to use this phrase. Write out ten phrases and send those ten phrases along with your next essay and I will give you feedback. This way, you can be 100% certain that in the exam when you use these phrases you're going to be using them correctly.



## TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO THINK LOGICALLY AND CRITICALLY

Next point: 5) **train your brain to think logically and critically**. Some tutors say ask questions about the essay question. So, what is it? Who is it? Why is it? Going back to a question about climate change; what is it? Climate change: it's global warming, too much CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. Who. Who is doing it? Humans are doing it more specifically companies are doing it, transport is doing it. Why are they doing it? Because it's necessary for the global economy you could say or it's necessary for society to operate.

So, there are those questions that would be good-- personally, I think that would be good for your training phase when you've got the luxury of time and you've got maybe an hour or two and you're in the library and you're just going to work through the question. That's fine.

However, if you've got two weeks to prepare for the exam, then these questions might just expand the ideas too many because I think there are two types of students. Those who don't have any ideas, okay? If you're saying yes right now, don't worry. Then using those types of questions what, who, why, that will definitely help you. Also, filling your head with ideas, researching topics is going to help you.



The second type of student is the student who's got too many ideas and has just got an explosion and doesn't know what to do and is panicking and gets really frustrated because more ideas start popping in. Then if that's you, then avoid those questions, okay? Avoid those questions. What you need is a system to help you organize your ideas, okay? So, the online course would be good for you.

**So, just to summarize: train your brain to think logically and critically. So, if you got zero ideas who, what, why or what, who, why, and research.** This is also included in the [online course](#). We help you identify what you need to research and then if you've got an explosion of ideas these need to be organized. This is why the template is so useful and just the system so you can drop your ideas into a coherent high-scoring C2 template.

**DO NOT SHOW OFF HOW SMART YOU ARE**

6) **Do not try to show off how smart you are.** Okay. Like I've said before, **IELTS is a language test. It's not a test of intelligence**, yes? This is a language test. What's the purpose of language? Well in this instance, it's communication. It's not art. It's not-- Basically, it's the art of communication I guess.



Anyway, in this instance obviously, it's going to be communication. IELTS is an English exam. English is a language. Language is communication, okay? So, maybe you've got a genius idea for climate change. It doesn't matter. Go for a more simple idea eloquently expressed and effectively expressed rather than a super-intelligent smart idea that's just going to basically butcher-- it's going to basically just chop up all your grammar skills, okay? I don't think I can be more blunt than that.

### FOCUS ON THE QUESTION

7) Wow! This is a beautiful point. **Focus on the question you're answering.** I get this all the time especially with students who've got too many ideas or like I said earlier, that are in love with a certain phrase and are desperate to use that phrase. So, they'll orientate the essay around that phrase and eventually become and eventually get off-topic. So, stay on topic. In fact, with the [online course](#), we have a technique where you double triple check if your ideas correspond to the question.

As I said just a few seconds ago, we're going for simple ideas that can be clearly communicated and we need to double triple check that we are on-topic all the time. So many times, so many



times I've seen essays where the first paragraph we're on topic and the second one, we're just going off on a different slightly related topic, but it's obviously something that the student felt passionate about, the student was interested about and it's not really related to the initial question.

What is also very common is that the second paragraph will follow on from the first paragraph. So, it is related to the first paragraph. However, the question was quite broad. So, we needed one paragraph about the first part of the question and then maybe a second paragraph about the second part of the question, for example, problem and solution essays.

**TAKE TIME TO CHECK AND RECHECK**

Final point: **take time to check and recheck what you've written.** If you are [getting feedback](#), then this is much easier. If somebody is looking at your work and saying David, your [vocabulary](#) needs to be improved, then the next time you write an essay, be it in the exam room or on your own in the library, if you know that vocabulary is an issue, then you go back and you start to upgrade the vocabulary that you've written.





This is why [computer-based IELTS](#) is, in my opinion, definitely easier. You've got this luxury to go back to copy, to paste, to reorganize, but if you do that with pen and paper, it's going to look like a train crash. This is going to look pretty horrific.

So, another point that you want to go back-- another reason why you want to review your essay is obviously to look for errors. Don't just like look for errors. Some tutors say start at the back of your essay or the end of the essay and work backwards. I don't know if that would work. For me personally, it doesn't work. I have to start at the top and then just go through word by word. This is what I do. This works for me. So, you need to try different methods and find out what works for you personally.

Also, you need to look for mistakes that you've made in previous essays. So, if you know that you make mistakes with the third-person singular, then you go back and you find instances or look for structures where you think there should be third-person singular or you keep an eye out for that and then you start adding those s's.

That's everything for this tutorial. Remember this is obviously applicable for band 9, but it's also applicable for the other bands. Even if you're aiming for band 7, you can still apply a lot of this advice to help to improve your score.



Before we finish, remember we've got apps available in the iTunes-- sorry in iOS Store. Wow! It is the [iTunes Store](#). We've got apps available for [Apple devices](#) in the [Google Play Store](#) as well for Android devices and these apps video search for Ben Worthington IELTS, then you get the newest podcasts and each podcast comes with a transcript, which makes it easier to read.

Also, you can go to [ieltspodcast.com](#) and [sign up for more IELTS material](#). We also send updates and special offers for students who are on the email list. That's everything and just checking in with my goals. I had four goals: to develop the speaking app, to improve the online course, to [improve the vocabulary](#)-- well, to re-visit the vocabulary system and to launch the second podcast.

Well, we are making progress with that. I can't be specific, but I will give you some more updates as we move along. I just wanted to mention that to say that I haven't forgotten we're still there and by the way, tell me what you think about the idea of the name [kisskissenglish.com](#). Everybody laughs at me when I tell them that name, but I reply by saying hey-- it was my friend Eli actually. He was just like what! And I was like yes, I know it sounds crazy, but you're never going to forget it and then I asked him like about a week later what he thought of it-- no, I said what was the name of my new English project and he was just like kiss kiss English and was like yes, you remembered it.



Anyway, yes. Get in contact. [Sign up](#). When you sign up for the email newsletter and the updates, you'll get my email address and you can send me an email and tell me what you think about this new project. Okay. Take care and good luck with your [IELTS preparation](#). You will get there. It's just a matter of putting in the time, keeping at it, and getting into a habit of daily practice. So, take care and all the best for 2020.

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