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**[Music]**

## INTRODUCTION

**Ellen:** Hi, everybody and welcome to another episode of [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com). This is Ellen and today, I want to give you some examples of 6.5 writing. Clearly, this is something that keeps coming up over and over and over again with lots of very frustrated test-takers wondering why they are stuck at a 6.5 and really just trying to understand what a 6.5 is.

A 6.5 is probably the most frustrating score that somebody can get in IELTS writing and there are a number of reasons for that. The thing is that for someone to get a 6.5 in writing, there are a whole host of scores that you could have gotten in your [Task 1](#) and your [Task 2](#) that would give you a 6.5.



**What do I mean?** I mean that writing, as with speaking, is a test where your score for that portion of the test itself is rounded down. I'm pretty sure I've talked about this in other podcasts that I've done as well. So, your score is rounded down. What does that mean for you?

That means that if you get 7s for all of your Task 2, okay? So, you get four 7s across the board and you get three 7s for Task 1, but you get one 6, then what that means is that even if you do the math on that score, they're not going to round you up to a band 7. What they'll do is they'll round you down to the nearest 0.5 score, which obviously is 6.5. Frustrating? Yes. Unfair? Perhaps, but it's frustrating and it's a position that a lot of people are in.

So, the reason why I want to talk about this issue first, is for you to understand how close you can get to getting a 7, but just that one 6 will destroy your score and give you that hated 6.5, okay? On the other hand, it's also possible that you could get two 7s and two 6s in one of your writing assignments or in both of your writing assignments and that too will get you a 6.5.

### LOOKING AT AN EXAMPLE ESSAY

So, I understand that a lot of test-takers are really frustrated with this and I don't disagree with them that 6.5, like I said really covers a wide range of scores in fact. So, I realize how frustrating it is. Now, what I have chosen to show you today is an essay from an old student of mine who



was stuck at 6.5 just like a lot of you are and she was very frustrated. She's a doctor and she wanted to go work in the UK and she needed very much that that 7 across the board. Unfortunately, through repeated efforts she kept getting a 6.5.

So, what I've chosen to do is talk to you and read to you her essay. Hopefully, we'll have enough time in this podcast so I can show you one of her Task 1s as well, but let's see how it goes. For now, we're going to start with one of her Task 2s and we'll talk about what an examiner is looking for in this essay and why an examiner might in fact give it a 6.5, okay? So, here we go.

### LOOKING AT THE TOPIC

Looking first at the topic, the topic is: Some people believe that everyone can create art i.e. paintings, music, poetry while others believe only people with special talent can create art.  
**Discuss both views and give your opinion.**

Okay. So, this is a pretty common type of essay; the discuss both views and give your opinion. I think at this point a lot of people following the podcast series know what they need to do. That they need to obviously discuss both viewpoints one in each paragraph, but they also have to make sure that they give their opinion. I've said that over and over again.



You absolutely need to give your opinion. The best place to do that is in your introductory paragraph. In this way, you guarantee that your position is clear throughout the essay where throughout clearly means from the beginning to the end, okay? So, that's one thing you have to bear in mind if you're looking for that much needed 7.

So, here is what our student said. *Undoubtedly, art is an expression of our feelings that is to say everyone can create a painting, music, or poetry or not. It is true that some people believe that only when owning an exceptional talent can someone create art while others insist that art belongs to anyone. The fact is that I am personally inclined to believe that special art can only be provided by talented artists.*

Okay. So, the good news is that the test-taker here has clearly rephrased the topic. That's great. That's important to do, okay? And she has also laid out her **position**. So, okay, great beginning, right? Well, yes, but what has an examiner seen that may make him or her go hmm let's see?

Well, there is some strangeness to some of the expressions. For example, in that second sentence the test-taker wrote that is to say, which is a nice expression. She wrote everyone can create a painting, music, or poetry-- and then there's a semicolon here and she says or not. So, this or not feels really unnatural.



Maybe it's something that makes a lot of sense in her native language, but in English, we just would never do something like this. There are other ways to kind of express this contrast. So, an examiner looking at this is thinking not really the greatest most natural kind of expression here.

So, what could she have said instead? She could have said that is to say perhaps everyone can create a painting, music, or poetry or perhaps they cannot. So, maybe this would have made a little more sense here, okay?

And the next sentence, she had some word choices which just felt wrong. So, she wrote it is true that some people believe that only when owning an exceptional talent-- This is the wrong word. She was close, but she missed it.

The word she was looking for was actually possess because you possess a talent, which is very similar, obviously, in meaning to owning, but it's just the wrong word to write owning, okay? It doesn't make a collocation. You don't say owning a talent. So, this too is something an examiner is looking for and thinking oh, she's close, but it's not precise.

Okay and then this too is also wrong. I don't believe she meant anyone here. What she meant is everyone. So, art belongs to everyone. That's what the expression should sound like rather than anyone, which as we know is usually used either in negative sentences or in questions. So, the anyone here is wrong. It should be everyone.



And then the last sentence, she says the fact is there's very-- not great punctuation here because she needed some commas as well, which is not helping her because the commas-- some people go overboard with commas. She didn't do enough, so the reader doesn't know when to pause, okay? So, there is some confusion here. The fact is that I am inclined to believe that special art can only be-- you don't provide art, okay? Again, it's an issue of collocation.

So, she's showing us in this short paragraph-- it's only five lines long-- that there are a few areas where her expression is not precise. She's using some wrong word choices because you don't provide art. Art is not provided by talented artists. It is created. It is produced by talented artists, but it's not provided, okay?

### CHOOSE YOUR VOCABULARY CAREFULLY

So, we're definitely having a problem here with vocabulary. That's what it looks like and that's definitely something an examiner is going to think about. The examiner is going to say okay well, a lot of this is great. The **grammar, the structure, the content** is wonderful, but some of the vocabulary is just a little off.

So, let's look at her next-- her first body paragraph rather. Okay. On the one hand, there are those who believe that art is whenever wherever. So, not only do toddlers can manage



drawings, but elders as well. In that case, everyone can manage to fill in a page with colors and figures without special qualification or innate talent.

What is more, imagination has no limits. Therefore, music can be written with no hesitation or expectation for exhilarating tunes. Lay persons relish the idea of producing a tune without any special talent by using patterns and techniques from older musicians.

Okay. So, some advanced language, right? Some nice grammar. It sounds like she covered the topic, right? Well, at first glance, yes. Maybe that's what you're thinking, but the examiner is going to be looking at this in a different way and thinking well, what has she really answered? What has she really told us? And they're going to look at it a little more in depth.

So, let's see here. In that first sentence, she says on the hand. Now obviously, this is wrong. It's on the one hand. That's a set expression. In fact, not only is it a set expression but it's a pretty basic expression that we use as soon as we learn how to write **argumentative essays**. So, the fact that she gets this wrong is not going to be in her favor. If you're aiming for one of those bands 7 or higher, the examiner is assuming that you know how to use this and you know how to use it really quite accurately. So, the fact that she doesn't use it accurately is going to be a strike against her, okay?



Then she says there are those who believe that art is whenever wherever. We would possibly say this. It doesn't feel terribly academic. So, she probably could have said something that was a little more precise, a little more academic-sounding. This sounds like something that really belongs in a speaking test, not so much an essay, okay?

And then so, not only do toddlers can manage drawings but elders as well. This is a sentence with numerous problems. First of all, it has **grammatical problems**. She's trying to use an advanced structure, which is called inversion and that's lovely, but she doesn't do it right. She does it inaccurately. It should be not only can toddlers manage drawings--

And then the word elders is wrong. A lot of people like to try to use the word elder, but it's very, very frequently used incorrectly. In fact, I would have to say that in my years of involvement with IELTS, I think people use the word elder incorrectly more than they do correctly. So, that probably should have been avoided.

In fact, I'm not really sure what she's trying to say. Is she trying to say adults? Is she trying to say elderly? I'm not really sure. So, you can see that not only is it a vocabulary problem but it's also a coherence problem because we now don't know who she's talking about, okay? So, it's a sentence really with a lot of problems.

### TRY NOT TO USE IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN TASK 2 WRITING



And then the next sentence reads in that case, everyone can manage to fill in a page with colors and figures without special qualification or innate talent. Okay, I don't think she meant fill in a page. That's not an accurate expression. I think she's trying to use a phrasal verb here, but first of all, you don't want to really use many phrasal verbs or any sort of like idiomatic expressions in your Task 2 writing.

She probably wanted to say to fill a page with colors because what do you fill in? You fill in a form. You fill in an application, but you wouldn't fill in a page with art. So again, you can see there's a problem with vocabulary here. Is it a huge problem? No, but it's lacking the precision that an examiner is probably looking for in order to give that 7 and it's consistent. So, we've pretty much found-- so far, we're only in the first body paragraph and we've found from the introduction to the first body paragraph some consistent errors with vocabulary, okay?

Then she tells us what is more imagination has no limits. That's a nice expression. Okay. No problems, but then therefore, music can be written with no hesitation or expectation for exhilarating tunes. What does that mean; no hesitation or expectation for exhilarating tunes? Though the language is nice. It sounds impressive, but what does it really mean?



Do you understand what she means? Is she telling us that anyone can write music as long as we don't expect them to write something exhilarating? I don't really know. So again, it's just not clear and so the examiner is going to look at this and think okay well, it's not clear because the language she's using isn't precise, all right?

So again, if you look at those [band descriptors](#), you'll see that there is mention of precision in the band descriptors. So, this definitely is not precise. We're unclear about what she's trying to say.

Then the last sentence in the paragraph which says lay persons relish the idea of producing a tune without any special talent. So again, there are numerous problems here. First of all, we don't say lay persons. We use the word lay people and then relish the idea-- it sounds like a set expression that she learned somewhere, but it really doesn't fit here. They relish the idea. That's not true.

Then **grammatically**, I think that the sentence means something other than what she intended it to mean. She says that they relish the idea of producing a tune without any special talent. It's as if the tune is without any special talent, okay, and I don't think that's what she meant. So, there is some incoherence here. I think she means that lay people are without any special talent, right?



## BE CAREFUL OF MISCOMMUNICATING YOUR IDEAS

So, her word order is creating some **miscommunication** here even though you can't say that grammatically, there's something wrong with what she said. Not necessarily, but in terms of the conveyance of meaning, there's a problem.

Okay. So, moving on to the second body paragraph. On the other hand, there are those who insist that gifted persons solely make art. Indeed, history has taught us that a man with innate talent can, for example, produce amazingly harmonious melodies. The same goes for poetry and painting. Monet, Picasso, Klimt, El Greco, Beethoven are really some of the glorious namely that wrote history. Not only did they use innovative methods but also no one ever before had used the same techniques.

If it was not for the cube designs of which YSL became famous for his clothes, the magnificent historic reference of Seferis in his poems or Renaissance drawing walls of Leonardo da Vinci, then we would not inherit those techniques and methods we copy nowadays. Only after those gifted artists do we enjoy art is any mean with amazing results.



Okay. So, I think that the paragraph actually started off quite well. She used some nice arguments. She used some good vocabulary, but she did have some problems with grammar, but not only. So, let's try to pick apart this paragraph one more time.

Okay. So, on the other hand, there are those who insist-- she wrote insist on. This is wrong. We say I insist on doing something. I insist on giving something. I insist on-- it must be followed by a gerund; by a verb with the -ing. That's not what she did here, okay? So, since she had a that clause, she needed to get rid of this on. It should just say on the other hand, there are those who insist that gifted persons solely make art, okay? That's accurate.

Indeed history-- and she put it in quotations although I don't know why-- has taught us that a man with innate talent, for example-- oh that an innate talent can, for example, produce amazingly harmonious melodies. It's not the greatest expression-- amazingly harmonious melodies. In other words, why are we using this amazingly here? It just feels a little too much. It feels inaccurate. It feels like she's throwing it in there to impress us, but it's not doing what she wants it to do, okay?

The same goes for poetry and painting. That's fine. And then she tells us these names, okay. Monet, Picasso, Klimt, El Greco, Beethoven. She should have put an and here before that last name in the list; before Beethoven because when we have a list, we have to put and before the



last item in the list. Now, we don't really know why she starts giving us this list of people. Don't know how necessary that was.

She tells us not only did they use innovative methods-- and here's where she starts having problems-- but also no one ever before had used the same techniques. Well, isn't that what innovation means? It's when you do something new that no one else has done before. So, it sounds nice when you look at it the first time, but in fact, it's redundant, okay and it has some grammatical problems, too.

So, let's look at that sentence one more time. Not only did they use innovative methods but also something else, okay? No one ever before had used the same techniques. So, she's just saying the same thing twice. So, there's absolutely no reason for her to use this structure even though it's lovely. It's just a redundant sentence. It's almost like saying not only do I like milk but I also really enjoy milk. So, that's kind of what's happened here. The grammar is okay in the end. It's fine, but it's not the structure she really needed to use here.

Okay. So, here again she has some problems. If it was not for the cube designs he or she has a problem. She's trying to do something really challenging here in terms of her grammar. Unfortunately, she doesn't really quite rise to that challenge. So, if it was not for the cube designs which made YSL famous, okay, the magnificent historic references of Seferis in his poems-- capital r here-- or Renaissance draw-- you don't say drawing walls. You would just say



or Renaissance paintings or Renaissance painted walls of Leonardo da Vinci, then we would not have inherited, okay?

So, she needed to use a different form of the **conditional** here. We would not have inherited those techniques and methods which we copy nowadays. So, the question here is okay, great. Let's assume she did do this grammatically correctly, but what is she really telling us? How is this relevant and how does this prove her point? Does it prove her point that only talented individuals can do this? Has she really said that expressly?

Not really. She is assuming that we understand that only someone like Leonardo da Vinci could have done this. Only a poet like Seferis could have done this and only somebody like Yves Saint-Laurent, but she should have said it. She shouldn't ask the reader to assume this, okay?

The rest of it is I think well enough extended that an examiner probably wouldn't lower her score because of something like this. I think she did a good job otherwise with her task achievement. So, an examiner would probably let this slide, but again, there was a grammatical problem in here. She tried to do something really, really complex, but it just didn't pan out.

Okay, and then only after those gifted artists do we enjoy art is any mean with amazing results. Okay, this is just full of mistakes. It doesn't make any sense and quite frankly, she keeps using over and over this grammatical structure called inversion which I personally like a lot and I love



to see it in essays. It's very formal. It's very advanced. It's impressive when you do it correctly, but it's just not panning out for her because she's doing it wrong.

Not only is she doing it wrong but it's a structure that she's used several times. She's used not only, she's used only after. There are a couple of other places she used it as well and so when you use something which is advanced and when it is rather impressive, you don't want to overuse it because it then loses its effect. It loses its ability to impress.

It's kind of like the examiner is like okay, well there it is again. Great, you learned inversion so now you're just going to keep using it over and over. You don't want that. You want to show a range of grammatical structures. You want to show that you know complex grammatical structures. Great, you should, but don't use one over and over and over again, okay?

So, how should she have fixed this sentence? Well, only because of those gifted artists do we enjoy art today. And then this really even today makes no sense to me is any mean with amazing results. It doesn't make sense, but still what she really needed to kind of hammer home and really make the point very clear is the point that she's actually supposedly arguing. Only these people with special talents can do such things, okay? And only the work of these kinds of people are considered art. So, she just needed to go a click further to discuss that.



Okay. So clearly, what is needed for special art is the innate talent of a person and the tendency for this, but we cannot underestimate those who try to do their best in a more impulsive way. Okay. So, a couple of things here that I want to discuss in this conclusion.

#### IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE

First of all, the first error is the word impulsive. It's the wrong word. It doesn't mean what she wants it to mean. I'm not really sure what word she means. Maybe amateurish, maybe in a-- I'm not really sure what she's trying to say, but impulsive definitely feels like it doesn't belong based on how she developed her essay up to this point, okay?

Also, the word underestimate is wrong. It sounds like a direct translation from her native language. In English, we don't use underestimate like this. So, a different word choice would have been important here.

There's another problem that goes beyond just vocabulary and it's an issue that we can find in the [band descriptors](#). If you look at band 6 under task achievement, it talks about conclusions and it might say conclusions may be unclear. Well, based on what she wrote here, the conclusion is a little unclear. Look at it again. So, what is needed for special art is the innate



talent of a person and the tendency for this, but we cannot underestimate those who try to do their best in a more impulsive way.

So, what is she telling us? That only innate talent or is she saying hey, you know what? People who aren't really talented cannot also be underestimated. So, the way she phrased this and the fact that she put this thing about underestimating those who tried to do their best last, it kind of gives it more weight. We're left not really sure because she's kind of 50/50 here, isn't she?

So, that creates some confusion because here-- she told us in her introduction that she thinks only special art can be provided by talented artists. We already analyzed what's wrong with that expression, but she expressed one view point here and then all of a sudden in her conclusion, she's saying yes, well you know what? They're both kind of important. So, this is a little strange. It's almost as if she's contradicting what she wrote in her introduction and we're just not really sure at the very end of her essay where she stands on this.

**MAKE SURE THAT YOUR POSITION IS COMMUNICATED CLEARLY**

So, an examiner is going to look at that and be like okay well, in the end, am I clear on this test-taker's position, okay? What would an examiner probably say about this essay? The examiner would probably say that the student is at an advanced level, but not consistently



advanced. The candidate shows good grammar, but it's not consistent. It's not-- there are inaccuracies and I wouldn't say that there's just like a couple of inaccuracies, but there are frequent inaccuracies, okay?

More importantly, I think probably for me the biggest thing here if I were going to give 1/6 anywhere in this essay, it would probably be for the vocabulary because she tries to use some good vocabulary and there are some areas where she does, but it's just not consistent. There are enough places where the vocabulary creates some confusion that honestly no; it probably wouldn't get a 7 because it just has that many errors, okay?

So, you can see that what at first glance looks like a really good essay and you think wow! This person really knows how to write. Well yes, but it's just not the kind of essay that will automatically get a 7, okay?

So, this is what I wanted all of you to hear today. I wanted you to understand really the complexity of the 7. I think this is a really important point just one more time to reiterate that a 7 can mean-- okay, if you've got these twelve scores, you need to have at least all twelve of those scores be a 7; at least, okay?

If you have even just one 6, it's not going to be a 7. It's going to be a 6.5 and I also want you to remember that you could have as many six 6s across those twelve scores and that too will be a



6-- 6.5 excuse me. That's probably the most important thing that we can talk about today; just the variation and the variety of scores that can end up giving you a 6.5, but I wanted you to look at this today and see also the kinds of decisions and the kind of thought processes an examiner might be going through and having in reviewing and grading an essay, okay?

So, it turns out that I wasn't able to get to more than one essay. I think that's okay. I really wanted to kind of go into this particular one in depth. I hope you found it helpful. If you do, I'm more than happy to kind of go over in great depth even more essays, maybe some Task 1s.

So with that, I leave you for now and I wish you all the best of luck with your [IELTS preparation](#).

**[Music]**

**Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com)