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INTRODUCTION

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Ellen: Hi, everybody. This is Ellen and I'm back today with another tutorial on writing. Today, I'm going to be talking to you about Task 1 Academic. Task 1 Academic is really interesting in a lot of ways. I think that a lot of people really underestimate it. True, it can be a little



overwhelming because when you first look at it, it's very different from anything that most people have ever written before.

By the time you get to IELTS, you've probably written a ton of essays in your life, certainly a lot of letters, but having to report on graphical information is usually something really unknown to a lot of people. Nonetheless, a lot of people, like I said, they underestimate it once they realize that it's only 150 words, I only need to spend up to 20 minutes on it, and it's only one-third of my total writing score.

And so for that reason, a lot of people really focus on Task 2 considerably and much less so on Task 1. I can assure you that this is a very bad strategy. Task 1 most certainly needs a lot of care, a lot of attention as it is really important. Even though it is only one-third of your score, that



one-third can drastically change your overall writing band. So, it's important to spend a lot of time familiarizing yourself with it and doing as well as you possibly can on this.

So, just to go over a few basics to make sure that everybody understands some things about Task 1. Obviously, you're reporting on some sort of graphical information. It's some sort of image that you're given. That image could either be a line graph, a pie chart, a bar chart, a combination of those. Some people can possibly get a map or perhaps you could get a table or a flow chart or a process diagram and as I said before, you might even get some sort of combination. So, all of these really need different kind of attention and a different kind of approach.

As I've also mentioned in some other podcasts that I've done in the past, there's also a difference between a dynamic chart and a static chart. They also require a different language. A dynamic chart is one that shows change over time and so that requires you to use some different kind of



language and a static chart is really just showing you one image with no change. It could just be maybe a month in question, a year in question, but there's no change happening and so the language you're going to use in something like that is really different as of course the language is in maps and in process diagrams. Okay, so just a couple of basic things I want to get into.

So, the subject of today's podcast is how to get a band 9. I know the band 9 kind of seems like this unreachable goal and the truth is that I have very, very seldom seen band 9s. I'm sure that they're given out there somewhere, but they are really rather rare. So, in order to understand what makes a band 9, it's important to understand the grading criteria for Task 1 and so for this reason, if you are able to, I'd like you to refer to the band descriptors for Task 1.

As I'm sure you know, the band descriptors for Task 1 are the same whether it's for general or academic. There are sections where it will say specifically that this refers only to general and



other places where it'll say this refers only to academic, but definitely refer to the band descriptors so that you can get an idea of what's involved here, okay?

So, I'm going to refer to mine straightaway as well. Obviously, we have task achievement, we have coherence and cohesion, we have lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy. So, when you look at task achievement, it really doesn't say a lot for band 9, does it? It actually says very few things. What you'll see is that it says basically that the writing fully satisfies the requirements and it is a fully-developed response. Well, that doesn't really tell us a lot, but if you look a little further down, so if you look at the 8, if you look at the 7 and the 6, it is assumed that you have also satisfied all the requirements of those lower band scores and so that means that in a band 6, you have included an overview. That's implied.



In a band 7, you've done all the things that are required there and so what that means is that you've presented a clear overview, you've clearly presented and highlighted key features. If you look at a band 8, the language is very similar, but it says that you've covered all the requirements sufficiently and then if you look at a band 9, what does it tell you here? It says you fully have satisfied all the requirements and you have presented a fully-developed response.

So, let's talk for a minute about what fully means. It basically means that there's really nothing else you can add. You haven't left out any important details. You haven't excluded any information that would give the reader a full wonderful picture of this graphical information.

One of the things that I always like to tell my students is that they should imagine when they are writing Task 1 that they are essentially describing something they are looking at to a friend. So, imagine that you're sitting with your friend having coffee and you're looking at maybe the



Sunday newspaper and you see a chart or a graph or something attached to an article you're reading that you find really interesting and you say oh, wow! Look at this. This is really interesting.

Well, if you were going to describe this chart that you're looking at, you would want to describe in such a way that your friend sitting with you could imagine the chart without actually having it in front of him. So, that means that you pick out the important information, the key information, some details, but again, you don't bog down your friend with a lot of unnecessary information, but at the end of your description, your friend theoretically should be able to draw at least an approximation of what you are looking at and what you have described. That, for me, is the mark of a fully-developed successful Task 1.



And so this is kind of your goal if you're aiming for a band 9. That you should describe it in such a way that the person reading or listening to your account of the information can essentially draw it or at least approximately draw it and that's what we mean by a fully-developed response. There's not much missing and you can understand the basic picture of this and even more than the basic picture of this.

The next criterion that we have to talk about, of course, is coherence and cohesion which if you've followed any of the tutorials I've done the past, you've probably understood that this is one of my favorite criteria in IELTS marking. When you are aiming for a band 9, look what it says. It says manages cohesion which attracts no attention. So, I'll read directly from the band descriptors. It says uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention.



And this is a really interesting thing. A lot of students like to use these linkers in their writing and in fact, I have seen some IELTS tutors in the past really stress the importance of words like firstly, secondly, thirdly, lastly, furthermore, and moreover. The fact is that these words act a speed bumps meaning that they force the reader to pause and it kind of slows you down.

Well, band 9 cohesion is exactly the opposite and that's what they mean here by attracts no attention. There are no speed bumps. There is no pausing because of these kind of linkers. What the writer is doing-- what the test taker is doing instead is using other types of cohesion. Words like so, words like such, words like this, that, those. These are all ways that you can connect ideas and you can connect words to each other, but it doesn't draw attention. It doesn't cause the reader to say oh, look. There's a linker. Let me pause. So, it's a much more fluent, much more fluid way of joining your ideas and of joining your sentences.



Now, if you look at the second band descriptor for coherence of cohesion under band 9, it says skillfully manages paragraphing. Now, we've probably said many times that paragraphing isn't super important in Task 1 meaning that you're not going to be marked down if you just have one big piece of text.

However, if you are aiming for one of those higher scores, it's really important to have your paragraphing done really well. Make it thoughtful paragraphing and so that could mean having your introduction and your overview in one paragraph. That could mean selecting the information in such a way that you paragraph it appropriately.

So, say, for example, let's say you've got one of these charts that have scores for men and scores for women. Well, an appropriate way to paragraph that would be to have a paragraph for your figures for men and then a separate paragraph for your figures for women. So, this is what we



mean here and it's interesting to note that paragraphing and appropriate paragraphing becomes a criteria when you look at band 8 and above because the band 8 says that the writer is using paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately.

Another thing that's really interesting to look at in band 8 is the sequencing of ideas. Like I said before with task achievement, when you're looking at coherence and cohesion, the assumption is that you have successfully completed all of the criteria in those lower bands in order to be considered for a band 8 and for band 9.

So, if you look momentarily at the band 8 for coherence and cohesion it says sequences information and ideas logically. There is a logical way to organize your ideas. One of the things I occasionally see in Task 1s is let's say, for example, you have a table. Sometimes students will



just look at the names along the side of the table and just go down that list, so to speak, and give their information and organize or answer like that. Well, that's not always logical organization.

Logical organization is if you actually interpret this data. If you say okay, well which is the highest number? That's what I'm going to start with first. Which is the lowest number? That's what I'm going to go to next and then after I have talked about all those highs and those lows, then I'll go about describing some of the important information in the middle. So, this is what they mean by sequencing information and ideas logically.

Obviously, that's not the only way to sequence ideas, but it's one way and you have to be able to do this in order to be considered for band 8 in coherence and cohesion and it goes without saying that you cannot get a 9 if you have not succeeded in this as well.



All right. So, going on to lexical resource now, the band 9 says that the test taker uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features, rare minor errors occur, only a slip. For the moment, I want to disregard that last section about the rare minor errors. In my experience, in order to be considered for band 9, there are probably not going to be any and if there are, there's going to be maybe one minor error. Let's not forget that Task 1 is small, so you really don't have a lot of room to make errors.

But looking at the other words that are used here; wide range, natural, and sophisticated control. These are the key words and when you're preparing for IELTS, I find that a lot of students-- and they rightfully do so-- they focus a lot on these vocabulary; things like dramatic increase, skyrocket, gradual rise, or gradual decline and these words are appropriate. They're necessary to learn and I absolutely encourage you to do so, but they are not the only kinds of words you need to know. Think about the kinds of things that we see in IELTS, the kinds of tasks. It's really



important to get an idea of the kinds of questions and the kinds of graphs that come up over and over again.

And so what you need to do is not just have these very Task 1 specific words at your fingertips, but you also need to have other words available for your use as well. For example, one of the things that I see a lot is students. There might be a chart about students and education and so forth. So, test takers are always struggling with what kinds of vocabulary they can use instead of students.

Well, one word of course is pupils or one word is minors. Minors meaning people who are under the age of 18. Sometimes people use words inappropriately. They are like scholars which has a much different meaning. So, you need to get an idea of the kinds of tasks that are being given and make sure that you have the appropriate vocabulary.



One word that I see a lot is people participate in, people participate in and it's the kind of word that people repeat over and over and over. So, you have to find other ways to express this kind of idea. Maybe you would want to use the word partake. So, rather than people participating in sports, you could say people who partook in this activity or people who were involved in this activity. So, think about alternative ways and different ways to express the same kinds of ideas because if you're using the same vocabulary over and over again, then this is not the mark of a band 9 Task 1.

Another example that I can give you of an appropriate word, but one that is maybe used less than others is a lot of times I see people writing this was more than that. This was more than that. This was less than that. Well, a word which expresses this was more than was outnumbered. So, for example, female full-time college students outnumbered men four to one.



So, this is a kind of word that you would want to use and just kind of piggybacking on what I just said four to one, another thing that is really important if you're looking for a band 9 score is appropriate use of prepositions. This is something that I see is probably one of the biggest mistakes a lot of test takers are making; using the wrong prepositions.

I know prepositions are tricky. I know people have a lot of trouble with them. Do I have a Holy Grail answer as to how to overcome this? Well, one way would be to just look at some good model answers to see how we use prepositions, when we use which prepositions, and what kinds of contexts and really practice using them appropriately and making them your own because the type of preposition you will use will really vary. It will depend on the structure of your sentence, the kind of information you're looking at.



So, I'm afraid that in the framework of this tutorial today, I can't give you a one-size-fits-all answer regarding prepositions, but definitely look at sample answers and definitely get feedback for your writing. This is really important because if you are taking risks and you are trying different things with your writing thinking hey, maybe here I need an in instead of a for. Maybe here I need a to instead of an on. It's really important to have someone review your writing and tell you well, here you can't use this preposition. You need to do this instead.

So, that's a really important key even if you are a self-preparing which I know a lot of you are. Even if you are self-preparing, do have someone look at your writing; somebody experienced, somebody who knows IELTS to tell you this is working, this is not working.

The last criterion that I want to talk about today in order to get a band 9, of course, is grammar. In order to be considered for a band 9 in grammatical range and accuracy, you're supposed to



have a wide range of structures. You're supposed to show full flexibility and accuracy. Well, the accuracy part is pretty easy to understand. It means you're not making a lot of mistakes and that's true, but you have to do other things as well.

So again, just for a moment, let's look at some of those lower band criteria to see what is being asked there. In a band 7, we see that you're supposed to use a variety of complex structures. At the band 8, it says a wide range of structures, which is pretty similar to the band 9. So, not a lot of difference, but the point is that they are expecting us at this level to use complex structures.

So, I know a lot of IELTS test takers are then thinking well, how can I possibly use a lot of complex structures in a piece of writing which is rather dry really and I'm only supposed to be writing for about 15-20 minutes and it's only like 150 words? Well, all of these concerns are



really valid, but the fact is that there are certain grammatical structures that work really, really nicely in a Task 1.

So, one of the types of sentences that we want to use for our language to be complex in Task 1 is some of these sentences that have contrast. So, words like although, words like despite, words like while. What do I mean? Something like-- let me think of an example for you-- although female full-time students rose over the period, the number of male students declined or you could try it with despite. Despite the increase in female full-time student numbers, those of male full-time students fell dramatically and so that's a complex sentence.

Obviously, you're not going to have a Task 1 full of just that kind of structure, but it is one type of structure you can use. Another type of structure that is considered complex is something called a cleft sentence. Look it up whether you have an advanced grammar book or maybe you



want to look it up online, but it's called cleft and what it is is there are a couple of different ways to do it.

The way that I want to talk about today is something that you could actually use for your overview. So, it would sound something like this. What is clear from the graph is that female students in full-time education were far greater than males in the same educational category. That's a cleft sentence. It's got more than one noun. It's got more than one verb and so it's an advanced grammatical structure. So, try to use it. See how you can incorporate it in your writing.

Another type of complex grammatical structure you can use is something called a participle clause. So, that would sound something like this. Having started the period out as the lowest group of students, females in full-time education actually finished the period with the highest



numbers or something like that, but the point is for you to understand the grammar of what it is we're talking about and that's called a participle clause.

So, these are some types of grammatical structures you can use that are complex. They are advanced and using language like this is definitely going to help you on your way to getting a 9 in grammatical range and accuracy.

Now, the other thing that we have to really be aware of since we talked about accuracy are things like tenses. We must be able to use the right tenses. So, you may need to use the past simple quite a bit. Sometimes if you've got one of these tasks where you have to project into the future, you're going to need to use a variety of things like will, like is predicted to be, is forecasted as being or is forecasted as reaching or things like this which are also advanced.



In a lot of process diagrams, we need to show that we can accurately use the passive voice. So, for example, a brick is passed through a conveyor belt before it is placed in a hot oven. So, passive voice. These might seem kind of less sophisticated and less advanced yet they are absolutely necessary in order to get that accuracy part of the of the score.

A lot of Task 1s require us to make comparisons and these comparisons also give an excellent opportunity for you to show some advanced grammar and accuracy as well. So, you could, of course, say that there are more women in full-time education than there are men. You could say that, but another way you could say it is the figures for women in full-time education are four times greater than those of men in the same.



So, what you're doing there is you're showing some advanced grammar. You're also showing some really nice cohesion because you're not repeating the same words over and over and it's a nice thing to kind of slip in there in your Task 1.

Of course another advanced grammatical structure which is really important to use in your Task 1 is relative clauses. So, using words like which, where, on which, in which, whose; using all these words and using them appropriately and accurately is really important. It's an important step in getting that score that you need as well.

One last thing that I want to talk about is adverbs. So, words like dramatically, drastically, gradually; these are wonderful words to use, but it is important that you understand the grammar behind them when we use them, that we don't use them in front of a noun. They need to be used either with an adjective or with a verb and they also have to be placed appropriately. So, these



are some things that are kind of maybe intermediate elementary grammatical points, but again, it'll be impossible to get a band 9 if you're getting these wrong.

Even if the rest of your grammar is on point and it's accurate and it's beautiful and it's complex and advanced; if you're getting these basic things wrong, well then an examiner is not going to look at some basic grammatical errors very leniently. So, keep that in mind when you write. Your basic-- your elementary grammar is just as important as some of these higher-level structures that you're using.

So, I hope that you enjoyed this podcast about how to get a band 9 in Task 1. Task 1 can be challenging, but it's also a really interesting piece of writing just because it's so different from Task 2. It's a challenge and we're here, of course, to help you to improve and to do as well as you can on your IELTS test.



So, definitely check out our essay correction packages or, of course, the online course which tells you everything you need to know about everything IELTS. I definitely encourage you to look at all the options that are available to work with us. So, best of luck to all of you. Good luck with IELTS.

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