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## INTRODUCTION

**Ben:** The difference between Academic and General IELTS. Hello there, students. In this tutorial, Daphne and myself will explain the differences between the Academic and General, the similarities, what they're used for, the scoring systems, and then which one is easier. So, hello there, Daphne. How are you doing today?

**Daphne:** Hi, Ben. I'm really well, thank you. Hi, everyone.



**Ben:** And excellent. All right. So, let's see. If you're a student, Daphne-- I know we're going a bit off piste here-- which one would you prefer to take before we get into the details?

**Daphne:** I've no doubt about that one. I prefer to take General because I really like the General Writing Task 1 which is the letter writing task because for me, it's actually quite useful to know how to write these essays. It's really important and quite often in life if you're applying for a job to be able to write a cover letter that would go with your CV, to be able to write a letter of complaint. It's amazing how often we actually do need a lot of these skills when we're communicating with people. So, I definitely prefer General because to be honest, with the Academic Writing Part 1, I don't very often luckily in my life have to report on graphs.

**Ben:** Me neither. Me neither, but yes. So, I totally, totally agree with you there. With the General Training you do pick up some useful life skills such as writing these letters and yes, I do set-- but nowadays, I find it's more emails, but still there's a lot of phrases that can be carried over and used in your emails and especially when you're going for a job application.



**Daphne:** Exactly. Yes, yes, yes.

**Ben:** Okay then. So, a lot of students will be wondering which one to take. So, we could briefly say that the academic one is designed-- Academic IELTS is designed for those who intend to study at an English-speaking university and will also need some kind of professional registration. So, I was speaking the other day with a student-- Gabriella-- and she'd taken the IELTS to-- so she could practice physiotherapy or at least start the process of practicing physiotherapy in Australia.

**Daphne:** Oh, wow!

**Ben:** Yes, yes. What would General Training IELTS be useful for or who would it be useful for?

**Daphne:** I think General is more for somebody who wants to migrate to an English-speaking country. So, whereas with Academic you've got like university like a postgraduate or something or as you say a professional like a doctor or something for the Academic, the General is more if



you want to go and live in a different country. So, it's for workplaces. So, you need to prove to that country, for example if you were moving to Canada that you have got a significantly high level of English, but not necessarily academic level, but a very good level of English.

**Ben:** Yes, yes and during my time, I've heard of Filipinos going over to Canada to become like-- well, electricians in the Philippines going over to Canada and they need to take the IELTS. I've also heard of Irish people taking the General IELTS Training when they want to migrate to Australia because they just pick up a boat load of points in the process and for some of them-- for native English speakers, it can be quite a challenge because a lot of us we don't continue writing after school and I'm pretty certain if you go into the trades, you're almost likely to not touch a pen and paper or write an essay because you just don't need it.

**Daphne:** I agree and I think it's quite hard actually. I mean I know the immigration the standard of-- it's very difficult to get into these countries, but I think if you've trained as a professional in terms of you have a trade, you're an electrician to take your example and then you're suddenly



being made to write difficult essays. It's a long time since school, so you do need some help along the way to get ready for it don't you for the exam?

**Ben:** Absolutely, absolutely and I've seen some of these essays and they are written-- the grammar is fine, but they're all written in a non-formal style with the contractions and the informal structures and vocabulary. So, yes. I think this is probably why it is doubly challenging for a non-native English speaker because not only are they writing in a different language it's a different style with its own set of rules.

So, moving on. What are the similarities between these two tests, Daphne?

**Daphne:** Okay. So, the structure of both of them is identical. So, there are four parts to the skills-- four skills you need to show, four parts to the exam: listening, reading, speaking, and writing and they both last the same time. So, listening is 30 minutes. Reading and writing are one hour each and the speaking is around 14 minutes. Sounds quite precise, doesn't it? Around 14 minutes.



And the content of the listening and speaking parts are the same-- that's really important-- and the exams are usually held on the same dates. So, there's usually some extra sessions for Academic IELTS, but normally, the listening, writing, and reading are on the same day and then the speaking is either maximum seven days before or seven days after. So, those are the similarities.

**Ben:** Got you, got you. Okay and the differences. So, basically, one of the biggest differences is with the reading. So, in the Academic IELTS, there's three texts and it's more of an academic style; the text, the writing, the content and it's 40 questions in one hour which is the same with the General, but with the General, that's divided into four texts, so obviously they're going to be shorter and it's more of a generalist sort of like theme. It's more social and sort of like work context. So, I think that would make it slightly easier as well. And then--

**Daphne:** I think that makes a big difference, yes, just quickly on the reading. I think that makes a big difference because the academic style writing is very dense and there's going to be a lot of



vocabulary you're probably not familiar with whereas the General Training normally the vocabulary would be more accessible I think.

**Ben:** Yes, excellent point there. It's closer to your everyday English or sort of like higher level English and with the writing, obviously for Academic Task 1 as we were saying, you've got to describe some kind of graphic. It could be a line graph, pie chart, bar chart, flow diagram. It could be any of those and as we know for the General, there is a-- you've got to write a letter. It could be formal, semi-formal, or informal letter of complaint, a job application, a letter complaining about an annoying dog, whatever.

And it's kind of strange this, Daphne, because I've looked on IELTS IDP and I've looked at past papers there and it says underneath the question write 150 words minimum in 20 minutes-- write 150 words minimum, but then I've looked at other official papers and they don't say this word limit and it seems-- yes...



**Daphne:** I am so glad you brought that up, Ben, because it's just really, really confusing. I think in people's heads and because of this it's written in the IDP, there is this idea of 150 words minimum for the Task 1 and 250 minimum for the Task 2. I would say to students aim for 170 on Task 1, but put your maximum effort into Task 2 because the Task 2 has double the marks of Task 1 and in the Task 2, it's pretty hard to develop an essay well in 250 words. I reckon you're going to need 33-- I think you probably need to go to 350. I mean between 300 and 350, maybe more if you're super-fast at writing, but I think-- yes, it's a guideline, but then as you say it's not always there.

**Ben:** Exactly. Yes, yes. So, I totally agree with you there, Daphne, and even though it's on some papers, it might say minimum 250 words. If you're aiming for a band 7 or above, you should really be going for 350 because with that amount of words you've got the ability to fully and coherently develop your argument in your body paragraphs.



**Daphne:** That's so true, yes. You need to be able to show the grammar. You need to show the language and you need complex sentences and complex sentences take a lot of words.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes. Good point there. Good point. So, the difference between the questions is that the Academic one will be slightly more complex. It's going to be a little bit more sort of like detailed and obviously a little bit more scientific where some of the General Training ones I've seen, some of the questions might be should employers allow the families on work holidays with them and that's not very sort of like scientific based whereas an Academic one could be about pollution in the city centers, for example. So, it's--

**Daphne:** Absolutely.

**Ben:** Yes, it's only a small difference, a small nuance between them, but that difference is definitely there.



**Daphne:** And therefore as you say continuing with the whole theme about the vocabulary, your vocabulary for the Academic writing would need to be more particular, more specific, more precise maybe than the General one which would have a broader theme, wouldn't it?

**Ben:** Exactly, yes, exactly and just one last thing before we move on to the differences. Personally, I think the General is not only more useful as we mentioned before but I think it's considerably easier-- General Task 1 that is-- because you are expected to learn a list of phrases like Dear Sir or Madam, please find attached or please find overleaf or please don't doubt to if you have any further questions. All these set copy-paste phrases and they're expected. Using those kinds of phrases in other parts of the test might trip you up, but in the General, you're expected to use this formal register of phrases that can help you-- well, help you score higher.

**Daphne:** Yes, I think that's a really good point and you can prepare easily for that. That's something you can learn. It's something you can see if you're reading letters or reading emails. This is how-- we do use these phrases. They're genuine.



**Ben:** Exactly.

**Daphne:** You get familiar with these fragments we call them and these sort of phrases of language and as Ben says, you can just put that into your writing and that gives you the structure. So, that gives you the coherence. It all kind of falls into place like a jigsaw, doesn't it?

**Ben:** Absolutely, absolutely and another advantage of using these phrases is that you've automatically got maybe 20%, 30% of your sentence grammatically perfect. Of course, you have to use them in context, but a phrase like please don't hesitate to ask if you have any further questions, it's totally at home in a General Task 1 essay obviously depending on the context, but it's practically a whole sentence you can copy-paste and include in your essay-- in your writing letter without any risk of losing any marks.

**Daphne:** Yes, it's a good bonus. Good thing to do, yes.



**Ben:** Exactly. Okay. So, let's have a look at the differences in the scoring system. So, what's the deal with listening and reading, Daphne?

**Daphne:** Yes. So, these are the differences. So, listening and reading both have a total of 40 questions and marking is simple because it's either right or wrong. So, it's marked on what we call raw scores. So, the raw scores are then converted into the corresponding band score. So, because the General Training is considered to be easier than Academic, you need to score a higher raw score in the reading test in General to get the same band score.

This is confusing, but I'm going to give you an example. So, the IELTS website says that usually, the greater number of questions must be answered correctly on General Training reading to secure a given band. So, Ben, do you want to compare the scores there?

**Ben:** So, for the Academic at band 9, you need to be getting 39 out of 40 whereas for the General you need to get 40 out of 40. And then for the Academic for 8.5, you just need 37 whereas for the General you need 39. And then for band 8, you need 35 out of 40 for the Academic and 38



out of 40 for the General. And then for band 7, you need 30 out of 40 whereas for the General you need to get 32-- no, 34 out of 40. And there is a full table on the post that we've got about this on the tutorial and I think it's much easier if you see it in a table format.

**Daphne:** So, you need more marks in General, basically to get the band.

**Ben:** Yes, that makes sense because going for the General test then you're probably going to be-- just take the electrician as an example. You're going to be in an environment where you're probably going to be using your English day in day out. So, you probably want a higher grasp of what's being communicated rather than sort of like a more precise exact one which is what's required with the Academic I think if I'm understanding this correctly.

**Daphne:** Yes, I mean it's a big differential, isn't it? I mean to get your band 8, you need three more points in the General than you do in the Academic, but then that obviously reflects the fact that it's considered to be easier. So, what they're trying to do is wipe out this idea that it's much easier because you need to get more points. So, it has to be valid, doesn't it?



**Ben:** Yes, yes. So, just in summary, you need like a higher quantity of correct answers to score the same whereas in Academic, you just need to get more answers to get a band-- Sorry. You need to get 35 out of 40 to get a band 8 whereas for the General, you need 38 to get the band 8. So, you need higher-- yes, in pretty much every level, you need more correct answers to get the score-- to get the same or a higher score than in the Academic. All right.

**Daphne:** Exactly, exactly, yes. Wow!

**Ben:** So, I think we've just answered our next question which is one of them easier than the other? This is really interesting because we went to the official IELTS website and we found the official results show that the average score in Academic IELTS is 5.9 whereas in General, the average result is 6.2.

**Daphne:** Wow! I was really surprised, Ben, when I read that. I was really surprised because I kind of thought it would be the same. I hadn't really-- that's quite a big difference, isn't it?



**Ben:** Yes, yes, definitely and it's funny because I think the vast majority of students take the Academic IELTS as well as far as I understand. I think it's something like 75% take the Academic and 25% take the General, but it seems that more students are obviously having a tougher time with the Academic and it probably goes without saying that within these, the hardest section or the hardest part of the exam is the writing. And what are the average band scores for those there I think?

**Daphne:** Yes, this is really interesting and this just shows how important it is to get feedback and get help on your writing. So, the average band score for the Academic is 5 and in General is 5.95. So, it's almost a whole band difference between the General and the Academic. So, for me that absolutely underlines how challenging this writing is and if you can get feedback and you can get help on your writing, that will just really help you on that.

**Ben:** Excellent point there. Excellent and moving on to the reading, I think scores are generally higher than this because this is an area that a student can take control of themselves whereas if



you start to try and improve your writing by yourself, it can be quite a challenge whereas with the reading, you've got the answers at the back of the book, for example or in the next page if you're working online whereas with the writing, it's really difficult.

So, this is another reason why getting that feedback will help you improve much faster and also not only show you where you're going wrong but also give insights as to where you are going right as well.

**Daphne:** Yes, yes, that's very true because if you're making mistakes writing and if you're not getting any feedback, you're just going to make the same mistakes again. You could write loads of essays, but they might all have the same mistakes in which is very, very depressing.

**Ben:** Exactly, exactly and I think especially if you're in this rut, if you're in this situation of taking exam after exam after exam, then you definitely need to get help and going down to your local academic or language center wherever, that could be helpful, but if you are only just



struggling with the writing, then I would strongly recommend you get some personalized writing help.

And also, if you're working full-time, you probably don't have time or money to go to your local language center and just remember they're going to be looking at-- the class will be there with six other people and you'll be given the tutorials, you'll be probably taking a lot of time to get to the test center. So, you might really want to just consider-- especially if it is just the writing-- consider going online and getting some expert help there. Okay.

**Daphne:** Good, yes, absolutely, yes.

**Ben:** So, moving on to the next part-- sorry, Daphne. Did you want to share anything?

**Daphne:** No, no. I was going to say I completely agree, Ben, and I think that your point about the feedback being personalized is really important because sitting in a class where you might feel confident on one part of your writing but everyone else isn't, then you're thinking well, why



am I here? But if there's somebody actually pointing out your errors, then that's specific for you and obviously, you're going to improve faster when you understand what your mistakes are as you say.

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes, absolutely. I hadn't thought about it like that, but you're totally right. If the whole class is about introductions and you've already mastered introductions, then you've wasted a full hour and you've paid for that hour as well. So, it's not the best position to be. Okay. So, as we were saying, the average score for the writing in the Academic is 5.9-- sorry is 5; band 5 whereas the average score for General Training in the writing is 5.95, so it's almost band 6. And for the reading, it's 6 for band 6 for the Academic and again higher 6.35 for the General Training.

**Daphne:** Yes.

**Ben:** And so moving on. As we've been saying before, the reading texts in the General are longer and you've got to score more in order to get the same or the equivalent band score. So, it's just



good to know that before you start these tests. Now, regarding the listening and speaking, we don't have those scores-- the average scores for those just yet.

**Daphne:** No, but they're both the same in terms of work, in terms of the structure obviously as we said. The listening test is the same structure as the Academic and the General-- sorry, the General is the same as Academic and the speaking as well. And the speaking I think in a way that's probably going to be marked the same. Well, it's going to be marked the same because they're testing skills and this is very important about communication especially if you're looking obviously either for a university course or you're looking to migrate somewhere, you need to be able to communicate. So, the speaking is a really important part of the whole test, isn't it?

**Ben:** Absolutely, yes, absolutely and whether you're doing the [IELTS Indicator Test](#) or if you're face-to-face with an examiner, it's going to be the same format and it's basically the same principles for both of them; sit up straight, smile, listen very clearly to the question, and just go



in there and remember it's your opportunity to shine and the examiner wants to give you those points-- wants to help you score higher.

**Daphne:** Exactly, yes.

**Ben:** Okay. So, that's it from us today. We were covering today the differences between the Academic and the General and basically, once you decided on the route you take whether it's immigration or for study, you'll pretty soon quickly find out which test you have to take. Either your immigration agent or your university will advise which one you're going to take.

And then the next step personally, I think is probably to do a mock test and just find out where you're losing points and also even do a mock test with the writing or get evaluated and find out where you are with there, where you're losing points and basically, just design a plan of what you're going to work on next. Is it going to be the [listening](#)? Is it going to be the [writing](#)? Is it going to be the [speaking](#)? And from my experience, that's one of the most straightforward ways to move forward with this.



**Daphne:** I think that's a brilliant conclusion, Ben. I think if they have a plan is really what you're saying. Have a plan. Stick to it and really put in the work and then you will get the results you want. It's all about being organized and practicing and then achieving. You can do it.

**Ben:** Absolutely and just one last thing. This reminds me that in the new [Sentence Guide course](#) that we are making, this new one comes with a schedule to help you organize your time because one of the biggest factors is planning, organization, and keeping that momentum; keeping moving forward, writing essays, and keep on improving and that's what we want to be doing each and every day.

**Daphne:** Brilliant.

**Ben:** So, that's it from us. Have a fantastic day. Keep on working with your IELTS. It looks like we're around the corner for a lot of countries regarding corona, so that's fantastic news. If you are still in lockdown, I'm very sorry to hear that, but as a lot of other students have been doing, you



can really take advantage of this situation and knuckle down and get some practice in. Take this opportunity and use it well.

**Daphne:** We're here to help you. Good luck, everyone.

**Ben:** Good luck, everyone. Bye-bye.

**Daphne:** Bye.

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