



**Robert:** Hello there. Hello. It's Robert Buckingham here. How are you all? I do hope you're all well and ready for another IELTS Podcast session. Well, today I want to talk to you about IELTS writing and I've got a very, very simple piece of advice for all of you which will help you improve your writing almost immediately, seriously.

Okay. All right. All right. I'm not joking, but I know I know all of you IELTS takers out there are bombarded with tips about how to push your overall band score up from a 6 to a 7 or whatever and well and if it's not a list of vocabulary that you can't live without, it's those grammatical structures you must use to impress the examiner or help with pronunciation and I don't know what else, but okay.

Don't get me wrong. Don't get me wrong. That's all to the good. That's all great stuff sometimes, but these days, we know so much about helping students learn languages and about exam



techniques and with all the technological resources we have all around us, everybody, everyone out there should know how best to prepare for the IELTS test.

And if you have any doubts, well you know that practically instant feedback is yours whenever you want. You know as well as I do or better than me just go to the IELTS Podcast site and sign up and get your feedback, get your materials online and practice whenever you want.

But so I ask myself sometimes why doesn't everyone get at least a 7 or an 8 in IELTS particularly in the writing section? I was asking myself that question the other day and I came up with this. Listen to this. Obviously, there's more than one answer to that question of mine. Why doesn't everybody get a very high grade?

First of all, some people are not ready for the test. They need more exposure to English. They don't have enough English or they need to improve their exam strategies and techniques by doing more practice tests and getting good practical feedback on their progress, but there is another



type of test taker I want to talk to you about today. It's the one-- maybe it's you listening to me at the moment-- who can communicate well in English. He or she reads a lot in the language, has good listening comprehension skills, speaks fluently enough to make himself or herself easily understood and can also write pretty well at the same time.

So, they got everything going for them. What can go wrong? What can go wrong? I'll tell you. Over confidence. Over confidence makes that person to think why worry. It's just another test. My English is good enough to get me through this and get me a high grade.

Okay. I'll tell you something. From experience talking to students, teaching students, looking at exams as an ex-IELTS examiner, I know it's this type of IELTS candidate that often does badly in IELTS writing especially in Academic Task 1 essay. Why? I'll tell you why.

Task 1 remember is where you have to write at least 150 words summarizing the information illustrated graphically; a table, a chart, a graph, a plan, or a map and reporting on the main



features you see and making relevant comparisons between those key features. It sounds easy, no? Well, not really.

It's asking you to do something quite strange. Think about it. Just describe and compare data without showing that you're human, that you have any knowledge of what's going on in the world. Take an example. It's pretty easy, actually. It's easy because I thought of it and I don't think of anything that's not easy.

Imagine this. Two pie charts that show different ways people watch movies. One shows the year 2000 and the other 2020, so 20 years difference, right? So, we see the relative percentages for example in each chart. I don't know movies on TV, VHS-- hey, anybody out there remember VHS? Are you old enough like me to remember VHS or even before that what was it? Betamax or something? And then we go on to DVD and maybe cable or satellite TV. Do people watch movies there? How many people watch? What percentage? And finally things like Netflix and other stuff and don't forget the old-fashioned way of going to the cinema to watch your movies.



So, those are some simple ways that we can imagine these two charts. Okay. Now, in everyday ordinary life if you like, if we looked at the charts, what we'd find interesting is not really the numbers, the percentages in themselves, but understanding what it really means.

We might say to a friend hey, look. It says here that Netflix now has over 35% of the total movie audience. Well, you know why, don't you? It's because a lot of people are staying at home and a lot of young people don't even have a TV these days and they subscribe to Netflix. That's the way it's going, isn't it?

Yeah, you're right. Will I remember tomorrow the 35%? Probably not. I might think well, it was about a third or something or something like that. So, it's not the numbers that really catch my attention necessarily, but hang about. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. IELTS academic is called academic for a reason, right?



Listen to this. The worst mistake you can make in Task 1 is to speculate. In other words, to go beyond the data you see to draw some kind of conclusions even if we think we know why Netflix is so popular.

Now, for the test, we must only describe the important relevant features of what we have in front of us on the exam paper or on the screen if you're doing it on a computer. The what and not the why. The what and not the why, but at the same time we are asked to summarize the outstanding feature or features in what they call in the test an overview.

An overview this word and this idea is absolutely vital if you want to get a high score in Task 1 Academic IELTS. So many candidates just simply describe the data without mentioning the overall outstanding features seen in the data. The overall, the overview. How vital really is it?

There are other things that can lose you points in Task 1. Not writing enough; you didn't write 150 words. Your tone. In other words, the way you write is not really academic. It's not formal



enough. You didn't include all the data or you put some data which was incorrect. That's a terrible thing to do by the way and most of all as I said before, you're speculating. You're making it up. You're imagining why the data is like that.

Maybe you're right. Maybe you're wrong. It doesn't matter. You're not supposed to do that in the test. It's as simple as that, but it's the overview that's often missing. I've spoken to candidates. They say oh, I forgot to put the overview in and I might say I told you to do it. Oh my God.

Compare what the band descriptions says let's say for task achievement. If you want to get a 5, if you want to get a 5, you don't want to get a 5, do you, for task achievement in Task 1 it would say the candidate describes detail mechanically with no clear no clear overview.

Band 6, on the other hand, says presents an overview with information appropriately selected. It's getting better. It's getting better. You've got a kind of overview there. Band 7 that's where we



want to go, right? At least. At least. Presents a clear overview of main trends, differences, or stages.

Perhaps in my imaginary-- and I quite like the idea perhaps I should suggest this for the next IELTS exam. What do you think? Perhaps in my movie pie charts, I could write my overview after the introduction. There's a difference. The introduction and the overview are different things.

The introduction really is just a simple single sentence. Just one sentence which just says what the pie charts show. It's the what, where, and when if you like. The what, where, and when. The pie charts, for example, I could start like this. The pie charts compare preferred ways to watch movies in two years: the year 2000 and the years 2020 in a European country, for example. One sentence that's it.





Then I go straight to my overview and I can write one or maybe at least two sentences. Listen to this example. It is clearly shown that there has been a dramatic shift in the way people prefer to watch movies over the period 2000 to 2020. Instead of going to the cinema, most now watch movies at home. Furthermore, home viewing is now dominated by streaming services such as Netflix.

I've written three sentences. I've used some pretty good vocabulary actually, so uncommon things really I guess: streaming services, home viewing, dominated by. I've connected the sentences together pretty well. Instead of going to the cinema, most now watch movies at home. Furthermore, it's Netflix and also I have an opinion-- no, that's the wrong word. I don't like that word. It's not an opinion. I have a clear direction. I know where I'm going. I can see what the charts were really all about.



I haven't mentioned any real data yet, have I? That will come later, I but I'm saying it is clearly shown that and that there has been a dramatic shift. Home movie viewing is now dominated by. Dominated might mean 62%. I don't know. We're not talking about percentages yet.

After that of course maybe in two different paragraphs, I can describe and compare the data. Always thinking of comparing it, just not writing it mechanically. I'm not just saying something like in the year 2000, 15% of people watch TV or watch TV movies at home on DVDs. No. I've got to get a little bit more than that. I've got to see where is the essential connection between the information?

In the year 2000, although a relatively high percentage of people still went to the movie theaters, it was estimated that 42% of people regularly went to the cinema. However, an increasing number of people around 35% prefer to watch their movies on rented devices such as Betamax or DVDs.



Okay. Some people of course say that they could leave the overview right to the end after presenting the data. Well, I don't know. It could be a question of choice I guess although I feel personally that it has a better or a much better impact for the reader near the beginning. I'm telling the reader from the beginning what this is all about and then I'm giving the evidence. The evidence is kind of backing it up it's supporting the views that I see from the two charts, if there were two charts, for example.

So, that's about all I got to say really. It's quite short. It's quite short. What I'm really thinking of here is the idea of how to improve your Task 1. How it might be improved by working on that overview and that I honestly think will immediately bring benefits. If you do a series of task ones using the charts, the line graphs, maps, plans because there is a quite a variety of possible text formats in Task 1 in the IELTS exam.

Look at the information. Spend two or three minutes before you start writing, noting down not just the what you see there, the features, but what is the relationship between them? What does it



really mean? What are the significant things that you see there? We're usually talking about trends over time; tendencies, trends, changes of all different types depending on what the information is we're receiving.

There's going to be something there that you can clearly see and then think of ways of presenting that in one or two sentences. Perhaps let's say a minimum of two, perhaps three, who knows. It depends. It depends, doesn't it? Using phrases. Phrases that you can learn quite simply. It can be clearly seen. The charts clearly shows that there are simple ways to do this and also begin using your vocabulary in ways that show that you know how to handle numbers using words because that's what this is all about.

It's academic because it's a kind of introduction if you like. The IELTS examiners want to see if the candidate can survive happily and successfully in an academic world where you are probably going to use data in your studies, in your research particularly at postgraduate level, particularly of course in the science and the social sciences.



Perhaps who knows these days a little less so in humanities, but on the whole for most students, this should be a way where you can show the examiners that you can handle this type of text, this type of essay writing extremely well by clearly having a path, the direction you're going from the introduction to the overview to the description of the data and perhaps not necessarily so a final concluding sentence which more or less mixes the overview again perhaps with the idea of what the charts were all about and that's it. It's 150 words and I guarantee that if you really work on that seriously things are going to get really good for you in Task 1 and later on in Task 2 of course.

So okay. Okay. Have a great day. Have a great week. We'll speak again soon. Don't forget. Before I go, sign up to the IELTS Podcast if you haven't done so already. Most of you already have done, but if you haven't, get in there. Get on the website [ieltspodcast.com](http://ieltspodcast.com). See what they've got to offer you. Sign up for all the kind of material that they offer you there, the feedback, the improvement you're going to see in your essay writing just by handing them in and getting that



through on a daily weekly basis and you'll soon find that it's going to be very, very beneficial to all of you, okay? So, see you later. We'll speak again, okay? Bye.

[Music]

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