Improve your Skills

Writing for IELTS

with Answer Key

6.0–7.5

Stephanie Dimond-Bayir

MACMILLAN

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Introduction

Are you taking or re-taking your IELTS exam and hoping to gain a high score? Would you like to improve your academic writing skills? If so, this book is designed to help you.

Improve your Skills: Writing for IELTS 6.0–7.5 can be used for self-study or in the classroom with a teacher as part of a course. It can be used alongside other books or studied on its own.

Why use this book?

Successful academic writing is not just about practising a lot, although this helps! It requires you to do a number of things:

- comprehend the process of writing from the first stage (understanding the question) to the final stage (proofreading your final answer)
- recognize and produce the style, features and formats typical of academic writing
- develop the appropriate range of vocabulary, expressions and grammatical forms associated with successful academic writing
- be familiar with typical contexts and topics

Scoring well in the IELTS exam additionally requires you to utilize a variety of exam strategies and techniques, applying the skills and knowledge you have developed to produce a strong answer.

Working systematically through this book should support you in improving all these areas, helping you to understand the requirements of good academic writing then apply them effectively to achieve a higher score in the exam.

The content of the book

Improve your Skills: Writing for IELTS is divided into 10 units. The topics are typical of those found in the exam, ensuring that you have an awareness of likely subject matter.

Each unit is subdivided into three parts: Task 1, Task 2 and a Practice test. There is an answer key at the end of the book, as well as sample answers for the Practice test questions.

Task 1 covers the vocabulary, structures and writing features required to answer the first task in the exam successfully. This means it highlights the necessary language content, including related structures and grammar. It will develop your awareness of the processes of writing to support you in answering Task 1 questions more effectively. It will help you to understand the styles and formats of writing required. Throughout, it will provide practical exercises to give you practice applying this knowledge.

Task 2 repeats the process for the second task in the exam, developing the language, processes and skills needed to tackle this question. Each unit covers different aspects or formats required for Task 2 so that you are familiar with the range of task types which you may meet in the exam.

Technique boxes are found throughout each unit and are designed to give you practical tips and strategies on improving exam performance.

A **Practice test** is found at the end of each unit. Each Practice test gives you an example of both task questions, in the exam format.

Tips for using the book

If studying alone, it is recommended that you work through the book in chronological order as the skills and content build progressively. However, if you are working with a teacher you may be asked to focus on specific areas of the book or you may wish to focus on the content you have most difficulty with.

Using the Practice tests

You can use the Practice tests informally, as extra practice, or as a 'mock' exam, testing yourself either at home or in the class in exam conditions.

Ideally you should do some of the Practice tests in real time, i.e. giving yourself 60 minutes to complete both tasks without using a dictionary or any other support. You may wish to start by splitting the tasks and taking a break between each one. However, it is important to do some of the tests within a set time limit. This will allow you to see how you perform in exam conditions.

Using the Answer key

The key at the end of the book will allow you to check all your answers to the unit exercises. For each of the Practice test questions you will also find sample answers at the back of the book. The sample answers cover a range of student answers, from low to high level, and there is a commentary after each one, highlighting the typical errors and issues in the answer. Some of the high-level samples offer excellent models – though they are not the only way to answer the questions. Other samples are at a lower level and are invaluable in helping you understand the issues and typical errors to be avoided.

Summary of IELTS Writing Test Academic Module requirements

TASK 1	Describing a table, chart, diagram or process using evidence from the graphic provided	20 minutes; minimum 150 words
TASK 2	An essay describing a problem, response or opinion on typical topics	40 minutes; minimum 250 words

1 Education

UNIT AIMS

TASK 1 Education vocabulary
Identifying and ordering key trends
Overview of visual data questions

TASK 2 Understanding the question
Nouns in questions and introductions
Overview of essay structures

TASK 1 Identifying key information

1 Match the type of education 1–7 with the correct definition a–g. Which type of education are you familiar with?

1	post-graduate	**a**	learning that includes many areas, e.g. art, sport, social skills
2	continuing	**b**	learning for older children, usually between ages 11 and 18
3	secondary	**c**	a course that teaches the skills required for a job
4	higher	**d**	lessons for adults, often held in the evening, e.g. language lessons
5	well-rounded	**e**	learning at university or at a similar level, e.g. a degree course
6	vocational	**f**	basic skills – learning how to read and write properly
7	literacy	**g**	high-level learning for graduates, e.g. a master's degree/doctorate

2 Read the statements below. Do you agree or disagree with them? Why? Identify at least two reasons in each case.

a Traditional written exams are the most effective way to measure intelligence.
b A successful career is dependent upon going to university.
c Learning a skill through work experience is better than learning it in a classroom.
d Levels of literacy for young people are generally increasing globally.

3 Look at the graph opposite and answer the questions.

a What age group and type of student does the graph show?
b How many countries are included?
c Which years does it cover?

4 On this type of line graph there is always a horizontal axis and a vertical axis. Answer the questions below.

a Which is the Y axis and which is the X axis?
b Put the correct headings 1 or 2 into the gaps a and b on the graph.

1 Year
2 Percentage of 15-year-old children

5 Think about the key trends or patterns you can see in the graph and answer the questions.

a How many lines show an upward trend overall?
b How many are downward?
c Is any line consistently higher and/or consistently lower in general?
d Can you see any patterns by comparing the start and end points shown?
e Why has this type of graph been used and not a diagram or pie chart?

6 Look at the exam task below and answer the questions.

a How much time do you have to complete the task?
b How many words do you need to write?

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The graph shows the percentage of 15 year olds with low literacy (reading and writing) levels in four countries. Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

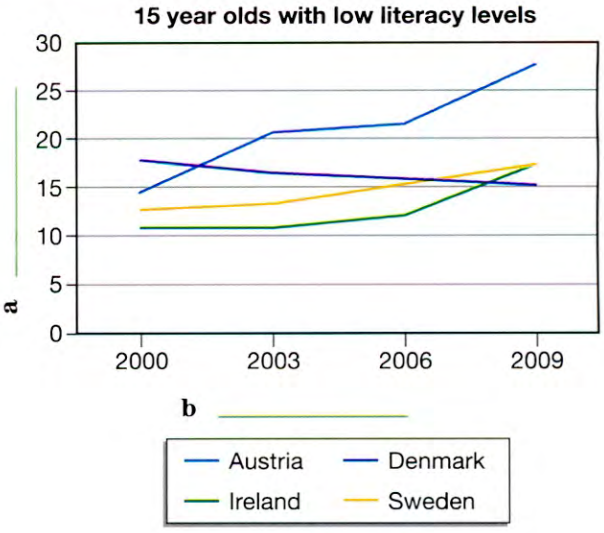
Write at least 150 words.

Technique

When writing about graphs, look at the visual information overall without focusing on the details. You will usually be able to identify three or four main trends or patterns. Circle or draw arrows on the graph to highlight the key features and patterns. Consider: upward and downward movements, highest and lowest points and the start and end points for the range of information shown. Identifying key trends will help you structure your writing.

7 Read the model text below. Match paragraphs a–d with summaries 1–4.

1 Gives an overview _____
2 Describes main upward trends _____
3 Describes the main downward trend _____
4 Introduction describing data set _____



a The graph provides information about the literacy rates of 15 year olds in four European countries over a period of nine years.

b There are two clear trends visible. Only one country, Denmark, experienced a slight fall in poor literacy levels, as numbers dropped marginally from around 17 per cent in 2000 to 15 per cent in 2009. This minor dip nevertheless gave Denmark the lowest percentage overall by the end of the period shown.

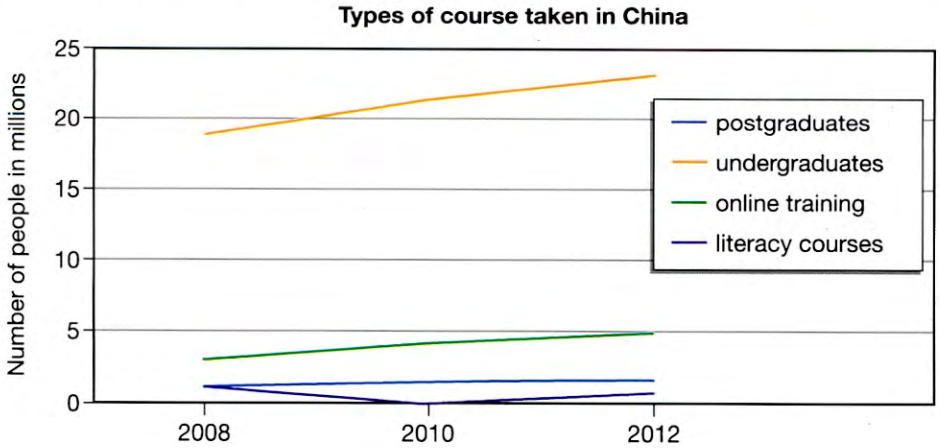
c Conversely, in the majority of countries the proportion of children with low literacy levels increased, the biggest rise being evident in Austria. This country had the highest number of children with weak literacy throughout the period, except in the year 2000 where, at 15 per cent, the numbers were approximately 2 per cent lower than those in Denmark. However, by 2003 Austrian numbers had reached just over 20 per cent and rose again more steeply to a high of around 27 per cent in 2009. Ireland and Sweden both saw steady upward trends in their totals, beginning with around 11 per cent and 13 per cent respectively and ending at a similar percentage of 17 per cent.

d Therefore, with the exception of Denmark, the percentage of 15 year olds with literacy problems generally went up. The difference between the countries was relatively low in 2000, ranging from around 11 per cent to 17 per cent, but this difference grew and by 2009 spanned from approximately 15 per cent to over 27 per cent.

Guided model

8 Look at the graph. Quickly check the title and axis to find out:

a what the chart shows.
b what the numbers refer to.



9 Identify three to four key trends in the graph. Use the questions below to help you.

a How many of the lines show an upward trend? How many show a downward trend?
b Which line is consistently higher? Which is consistently lower?
c What are the similarities and differences between the start and end points?

10 Look at the summary table below. Complete the table with notes about the graph.

1 Introduction	*Data identified – 4 types of course in China* *Dates specified – 2008-2012*
2 Downward trends	
3 Upward trends	
4 Overview	*Final summary*

Technique

You need to identify key trends and patterns in the data, and use details to support this information. If you list a lot of information about each part of the graph separately, you will not be demonstrating an ability to select and group information effectively. If you do not include supporting details, you will lose marks. Spend two or three minutes identifying key trends and use this to structure your answer. Add supporting details after identifying the main features.

11 Read the example question and model answer below. Ignore the gaps. Number the paragraphs a–d in the correct order. Does the model answer contain similar information to your notes?

The graph shows the number of students enrolled on different course types in China. Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main information.
Write at least 150 words.

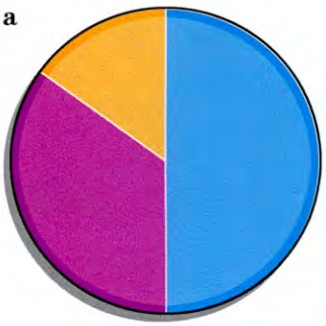
a The first key feature shows that literacy courses had the lowest number of participants overall for the whole period. This type of course is the only one which showed a _____ , beginning with just over 1.5 million students in 2008 then _____ almost 0 by 2010. Uptake _____ slightly in 2012 to just under a million but this course type remained the lowest in terms of student numbers.

b Overall, with the exception of literacy, the number of students on all the other courses climbed _____ with undergraduates easily outnumbering all other types of student.

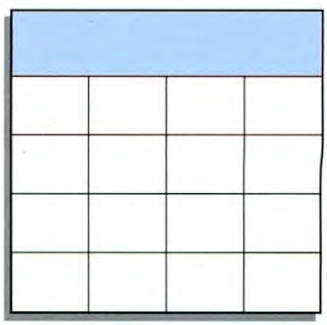
c The graph _____ the number of people enrolled on four different types of educational course in China in the period 2008 to 2012.

d On the other hand, the proportion of students on undergraduate courses showed the highest increase throughout the period and numbers on this type of course _____ from around 19 million in 2008 to 23 million in 2012. These courses had approximately four times as many students as the other types of course. Similarly, numbers of students enrolled as postgraduates and using online courses followed a similar _____ and increased moderately from 2008 to 2012, ending with around 2 million and 5 million participants respectively in 2012.

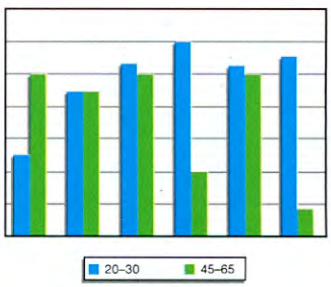
a



b



c



12 Read the model answer again in the correct order. Complete the answer with words from the box.

demonstrates ■ dipping to ■ downward trend ■ gradually ■ increased steadily ■ rose ■ upward trend

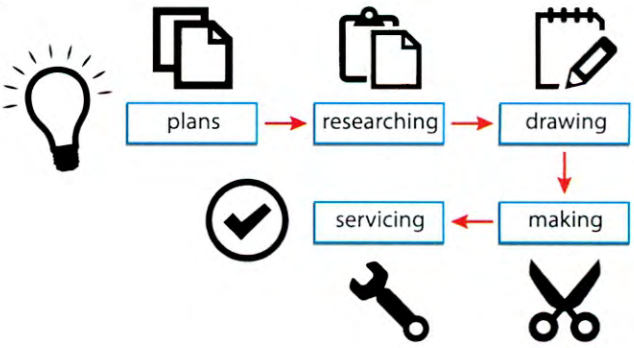
13 Match the visuals a–d with correct names from the box.

bar chart ■ pie chart ■ process diagram ■ table

14 Look at the visuals in 13 again and answer the questions.

a Which two visual figures can also show trends?
b Which of the visuals is best for high levels of detail?
c Which visual helps highlight proportions or parts within a whole data set?
d Which visual helps highlight comparisons between different categories of a data set?

d



Technique

Line graphs are useful for showing overall trends. There are four other types of visual you might write about in Task 1: bar chart, pie chart, process diagram, table.