

IELTS Writing (General Training): Strategies & Skills

This lesson introduces the General Training Writing test format, teaches letter-writing strategies for Task 1 (formal, semi-formal, and informal), covers essay structure for Task 2, and focuses on getting the register right. Students practise writing a formal complaint opening paragraph.

Target Band:	5.0-7.0	Duration:	60 minutes
Test Module:	General Training	Format:	Instructor-led with slides

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- * Understand the two General Training Writing tasks and their assessment criteria
- * Identify the three letter types (formal, semi-formal, informal) and choose the correct register
- * Structure a Task 1 letter with an appropriate opening, body, and closing
- * Write a clear, well-organised Task 2 essay using a four-paragraph structure

Materials

- * Slide deck (IELTS_Writing_GT_Strategies_and_Skills.pptx)
- * Sample formal complaint prompt (displayed on Slide 9 or printed)
- * Timer
- * Whiteboard / shared screen

Lesson Procedure

Phase 1: Warm-Up & Test Overview

Time: 0:00-0:08 | **Duration:** 8 min | **Slides:** 1-3

- * Display title slide. Ask: *"When was the last time you wrote a letter? Who was it to?"*
 - * Show Slide 2 (Learning Objectives). Frame: *"GT Writing is different from Academic -- Task 1 is a letter, not a report. Getting the tone right is half the battle."*
 - * Show Slide 3 (Test at a Glance). Walk through Task 1 vs Task 2: time, word count, what you write, scoring weight.
 - * Emphasise: *"Task 2 is worth twice as much as Task 1. Spend 20 minutes on the letter and 40 on the essay."*
 - * Highlight the four assessment criteria. Note that Task Achievement for Task 1 includes tone/register appropriateness.
- > *Many GT students haven't written formal letters before. This lesson needs to build that skill from scratch.*
- > *Students who have done the Academic Writing lesson will recognise the time split and the four criteria.*

Phase 2: Task 1: The Three Letter Types

Time: 0:08-0:16 | **Duration:** 8 min | **Slides:** 4

- * Show Slide 4. Walk through the three letter types with examples.
 - * **Formal:** To someone you don't know (company, manager, official). Use: 'Dear Sir/Madam,' ... 'Yours faithfully,'
 - * **Semi-formal:** To someone you know professionally (landlord, teacher, colleague). Use: 'Dear Mr/Ms [Name],' ... 'Yours sincerely,'
 - * **Informal:** To a friend or family member. Use: 'Dear [First name],' ... 'Best wishes,' or 'Take care,'
 - * Key message: *"The question always tells you who to write to. Read it carefully -- that decides your register."*
 - * **Quick check (2 minutes):** Read three scenarios. Students identify each as formal, semi-formal, or informal.
- > *Register is the single biggest differentiator between GT and Academic Writing Task 1. Students must get this right.*
- > *The closing salutation is a strong signal: 'Yours faithfully' (formal, unknown recipient) vs 'Yours sincerely' (semi-formal, known name).*

Phase 3: Task 1: Letter Structure

Time: 0:16-0:22 | **Duration:** 6 min | **Slides:** 5

- * Show Slide 5. Walk through the four-part structure: greeting, reason for writing, details/request, polite closing.
- * Model a formal complaint opening: *"Dear Sir/Madam, I am writing to express my dissatisfaction with..."*
- * Model an informal letter opening: *"Hi Tom, Thanks for your email! I'm so glad to hear about..."*
- * Emphasise: *"The first sentence must state why you're writing. Don't waste words on 'How are you?' in a formal letter."*
- * Point out word count: 150 words minimum. *"That's about 10-12 sentences. Plan before you write."*
- > *Students often write too informally in formal letters or too formally in informal ones. Drilling the opening line is the fastest fix.*
- > *The 150-word minimum is generous. Most students write 160-180 words for Task 1, which is fine.*

Phase 4: Task 2: Essay Structure

Time: 0:22-0:30 | **Duration:** 8 min | **Slides:** 6

- * Show Slide 6 (four-paragraph structure -- same as Academic).
- * Walk through each paragraph: Introduction (paraphrase + position), Body 1 (idea + support), Body 2 (idea + support), Conclusion (restate).
- * Emphasise: *"The Task 2 essay is the same for GT and Academic. If you've practised Academic essays, you already know this."*
- * Key difference: *"GT essay topics are more general -- about society, lifestyle, work. Academic topics tend to be more abstract or specialised."*
- * Remind: *"Task 2 is worth twice as much. A strong essay can pull up a weak letter score. Spend 40 minutes here."*
- > *If students have already done the Academic Writing lesson, this phase can be shorter. Focus on the topic difference.*
- > *GT Task 2 topics: 'Some people think children should start school at 7. Do you agree?' Academic topics tend to be more nuanced.*

Phase 5: Getting the Tone Right

Time: 0:30-0:37 | **Duration:** 7 min | **Slides:** 7

- * Show Slide 7 (register comparison table: formal vs informal for greetings, requests, closings).
- * Walk through each row. Read formal and informal versions aloud. Ask: *"Can you hear the difference?"*
- * Emphasise contractions: *"Formal = no contractions ('I would like'). Informal = contractions are fine ('I'd like')."*
- * **Quick drill (3 minutes):** Read 5 sentences. Students classify each as formal or informal. Discuss any disagreements.
- * Key message: *"Wrong register = lower Task Achievement score. The question tells you who you're writing to -- match your language."*
- > Register errors are penalised under Task Achievement. A well-written letter in the wrong register can still score Band 5.
- > Vietnamese students often default to overly formal English. Practise informal register too.

Phase 6: Before & After

Time: 0:37-0:41 | **Duration:** 4 min | **Slides:** 8

- * Show Slide 8. Read the BEFORE: student writes a formal complaint using informal language ('Hey, I'm really annoyed about...').
- * Read the AFTER: student writes the same complaint with correct formal register ('Dear Sir/Madam, I am writing to express my concern regarding...').
- * Ask: *"Which one would a company take seriously?"*
- * Key message: *"The content is the same. The register makes the difference between Band 5 and Band 7."*
- > Quick visual reinforcement before the practice activity.

Phase 7: Practice Activity

Time: 0:41-0:55 | **Duration:** 14 min | **Slides:** 9

- * Show Slide 9. Read the formal complaint prompt.
- * **Step 1 -- Identify and plan (3 minutes):** Students identify the letter type (formal), the recipient, and the purpose. Plan three bullet points: reason, details, request.
- * **Step 2 -- Write (6 minutes):** Students write the opening paragraph only: greeting + reason for writing + brief context. 3-4 sentences.
- * **Step 3 -- Peer review (5 minutes):** Swap with a partner. Check: Is the greeting correct for a formal letter? Does the first sentence state the purpose? Is the tone formal throughout (no contractions, no slang)?
- * Class debrief: Ask 2 volunteers to read their openings. Class evaluates register and clarity.
- > The opening-only focus is intentional. A polished opening teaches register awareness better than a rushed full letter.
- > Common errors: using 'Dear Mr/Ms' without a name (should be 'Dear Sir/Madam' if the name isn't given), contractions in formal letters, starting with 'I want to complain' instead of 'I am writing to express my dissatisfaction.'

Phase 8: Wrap-Up & Key Takeaways

Time: 0:55-1:00 | **Duration:** 5 min | **Slides:** 10

* Show Slide 10. Read each takeaway.

* *"What are the three letter types?" -> Formal, semi-formal, informal. "How do we split our time?" -> 20 min letter, 40 min essay. "What's the biggest mistake in Task 1?" -> Wrong register.*

* Close: *"GT Writing rewards students who can match their language to the situation. Practise writing one letter and one essay per week."*

-> Keep tight. The practice activity is the real capstone.

Differentiation Notes

For students targeting Band 6.5-7.0: Extend the practice to include writing the full letter body (additional 7 minutes). During peer review, partners evaluate whether the student addressed all three bullet points in the prompt, used appropriate formal language throughout, and included a polite closing. Challenge these students to vary their sentence openings.

For students at Band 5.0-5.5: Provide a register reference card showing formal greetings, useful phrases ('I am writing to...', 'I would appreciate it if...', 'I look forward to hearing from you'), and closings. Allow students to refer to this during the writing activity. Focus assessment on whether the student used the correct greeting and closing for a formal letter, not on grammatical complexity.

Assessment

Formative assessment throughout. Evaluate against:

- * **Letter type identification:** Can the student correctly identify whether a prompt requires a formal, semi-formal, or informal letter?
- * **Register accuracy:** Does the student's writing match the required register (correct greeting, appropriate tone, correct closing)?
- * **Letter structure:** Does the opening paragraph state the purpose of the letter in the first sentence?
- * **Essay awareness:** Can the student explain the four-paragraph Task 2 structure and the recommended time split?