

STUDY ENGLISH

IELTS PREPARATION

TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 26: GENERAL TASK WRITING

Hello. I'm Margot Politis. Welcome to Study English, IELTS preparation.

Today we're going to talk about letter writing.

IELTS Task 1 in the General Training module asks you to write a letter. We write letters to friends, strangers, businesses, government departments and institutions.

The tone of a letter can be formal or informal, depending on who is going to read it.

There are several purposes for writing letters:

giving or requesting information;

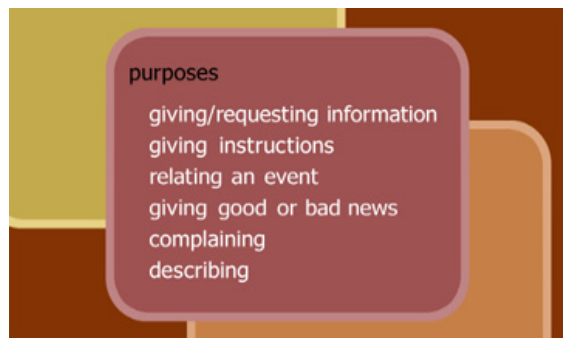
giving instructions;

relating an event;

giving good or bad news;

complaining;

describing.

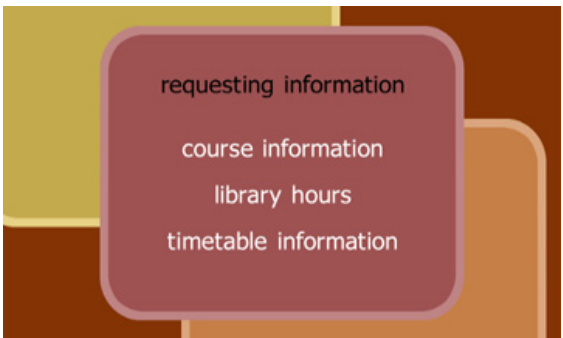


Some letters can include several of these purposes at the same time.

Here are some examples.

Letters for 'giving information' might include: travel plans; arrival details; what to see and do on holidays.

Letters 'requesting information' might be for: course information; library hours; timetable information.



Some letters for 'giving instructions' include: how to get to your house; how to operate a machine; how to open an account.

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And 'relating an event': an incident or accident; a wedding or function or a holiday.

'Giving good or bad news': cancelling an appointment; accepting a job offer; informing of the birth of a baby.

Letters 'complaining' might include: poor service in a restaurant; loud noise in your district; a problem with faulty goods.



And letters 'describing' might be about: lost property; a friend; or a place.

OK. That's an overview of different types of letter. Now let's consider the *organisation* of the letter.

Letters have a clear and familiar structure. Formal letters begin with a greeting 'Dear ___', and end with 'Yours sincerely'.

In between the top and the bottom, is 'the body'. But what sort of body? How do we decide about the shape of the letter between the greeting and the closing?

Well, we write because we have a *purpose*. It is important to indicate at the beginning of a letter what its purpose is.

Let's consider some examples.

If your letter is for giving information, you might start with: "I am writing to advise that";

or for requesting information: "I am writing to request information about";

for giving instructions: "I am writing to explain how to";

relating an event: "I am writing to describe the accident I saw";

giving good or bad news: "I am very happy to tell you that";

complaining: "I am writing to complain about";

describing: "I am writing to describe some lost property".

It's easier for the reader of the letter if it's organised coherently.

In Task 1, the way the IELTS General Training question is laid out will help you in organising your response or answer.

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For example, look at the following question – a typical question for Task 1:

Task 1 Question

You have to sit IELTS and you would like to do a preparation program to help you prepare for the test.

Write a letter to the Course Information Officer at a college that offers IELTS preparation courses requesting information:

- how long the course is
- how much the course costs
- course pre-requisites

You should write at least 150 words.

The way the question is constructed tells you how to organise your letter. There are 3 bullet points:

- how long the course is,
- how much the course costs, and
- course pre-requisites’.

This tells you that you should construct 3 body paragraphs, one for each bullet point. Thus your letter should look something like this.

First a *greeting*:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Then an *introduction* stating a purpose:

I am writing because ...

Then the *body*:

1. how long the course is
2. how much the course costs
3. course pre-requisites

And then finally, the closing:

Yours sincerely,

So when writing your IELTS letter, it’s a matter of being logical and organising your ideas.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing because ...

- How long the course is
- How much the course costs
- Course pre-requisites

Yours sincerely,

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Let's look at another question and decide how to tackle it.

IELTS Task 1 Question

You recently went to a conference in another city and stayed in a hotel. When you returned home you discovered that you had left your briefcase in the hotel.

Write a letter to the manager of the hotel, explaining the problem:

- explain where you left your briefcase
- describe the briefcase
- advise how to inform you, and where to send it, if found

You should write at least 150 words.

If we follow the same strategy as last time, our letter organisation will look something like this.

First a *greeting*:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Then an *introduction* stating a purpose:

I am writing because ...

Then the *body*:

1. explain where you left your briefcase
2. describe the briefcase
3. advise how to inform you, and where to send it, if found

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing because ...

Explain where you left your briefcase

Describe the briefcase

Advise how to inform you, and where to send it, if found

Yours sincerely,

And then finish with the *closing*:

Yours sincerely

The last thing to discuss about the letters you'll be writing is the *level of formality*.

The two IELTS letters we looked at should be formal.

There will be times when you will have to compose a less formal letter, with different language choices.

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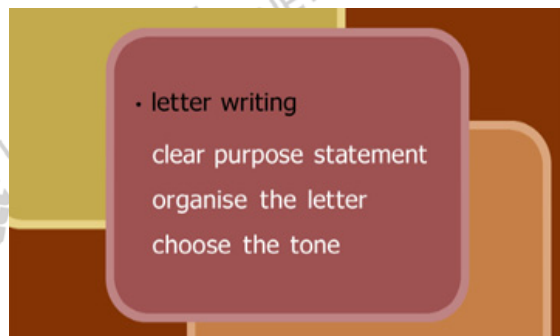
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Here are some examples:

more formal	less formal
"I am writing to enquire about the cost of your IELTS Preparation Program."	"I am writing to ask about the cost of your IELTS Preparation Program."
"This is due to the fact that teaching costs have increased."	"This is because teaching costs have increased."
If you require further information	If you need more information
"Please find enclosed"	"Here are"
"We have been forced to increase fees."	"We've had to increase fees."
"I regret to advise you."	"I'm sorry to 'tell' you."
"I will not be able to attend."	"I cannot come."

Well, you should now be able to practise letter writing. Remember, each letter you write will have a different purpose, and a *clear purpose statement* will convey your intent to the reader.

Organise the letter into several short paragraphs, and *choose the tone* carefully. Should it be more or less formal?



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That's all for now. I hope to see you again for another episode of Study English. Bye bye.