

OFFICIAL COURSE STUDY GUIDE

Academic Essay Writing for English Learners

Essay structure, coherence, and editing for non-native English writers - exam-ready skills.

LEARNING & STUDY SKILLS · INTERMEDIATE · 3 MODULES · 5 HR 26 MIN

Course by Write to the Top · Curated and published by MegaCourse

MEGACOURSE.APP

Academic Essay Writing for English Learners: The Complete Study Guide

2026 Edition

Published by MegaCourse · megacourse.app

Learn Anything. Achieve Everything.

MegaCourse curates the world's best free courses into structured learning paths with study guides, practice material, and certificates. This guide accompanies the MegaCourse course "Academic Essay Writing for English Learners", taught by Write to the Top. It is designed to be read alongside the video lessons and to serve as a standalone reference for review.

Study guide text copyright © 2026 MegaCourse. Course video content remains the property of its creators. You may print this guide for personal study. Redistribution or resale is not permitted.

Enroll, track progress, and earn your certificate at

megacourse.app/courses/academic-essay-writing-for-english-learners

Contents

<i>About This Course</i>	4
CHAPTER 1 Academic Essay Overview	6
CHAPTER 2 Essay Essentials	10
CHAPTER 3 Essay Essentials	16
<i>Glossary</i>	20
<i>Answer Key</i>	22
<i>Where to Go Next</i>	25

INTRODUCTION

About This Course

Welcome to the official study guide for "Academic Essay Writing for English Learners." This course provides a clear, structured approach to writing academic essays. You will learn to structure your arguments, ensure coherence, and refine your writing through effective editing. Mastering these skills is crucial for academic success.

Clear and well-organized academic writing is a fundamental requirement in universities and professional settings worldwide. This course specifically addresses the challenges non-native English writers often face. It equips you with practical, exam-ready skills.

This guide complements the video lessons from Write to the Top, curated by MegaCourse. We organize the content into a structured learning path. This includes defined learning outcomes, progress tracking, and a shareable certificate of completion. This combination ensures a comprehensive and effective learning experience.

Course Facts

FORMAT	3 modules · 19 lessons
VIDEO INSTRUCTION	About 5 hr 26 min
LEVEL	Intermediate
CATEGORY	Learning & Study Skills
INSTRUCTOR	Write to the Top
CERTIFICATE	Included with course completion on MegaCourse
COURSE HOME	megacourse.app/courses/academic-essay-writing-for-english-learners

What You Will Learn

- Structure academic essays in English with confidence.
- Write coherent paragraphs with clear linking.
- Avoid the errors that cost non-native writers marks.
- Apply the skills to exam and coursework writing alike.

Who This Course Is For

This course is designed for non-native English writers who need to produce academic essays. It helps you develop the specific skills required for success in academic environments.

Before starting, you should have an intermediate level of English proficiency. This corresponds to a B1+ level or equivalent.

Before You Start

- Intermediate English (B1+).

How to Use This Guide

This course is organized into 3 modules and 19 lessons, totaling approximately 5 hours and 26 minutes of instruction. You can pace your learning flexibly to suit your schedule.

We recommend watching each video lesson first. Then, use this study guide to review the concepts, work through examples, and complete any practice exercises. This guide reinforces the video content. It helps solidify your understanding of key terms and concepts through its review sections and glossary.

CHAPTER 1

Academic Essay Overview

This chapter introduces the fundamentals of academic essay writing for English learners. It focuses on the core elements that lead to high scores in exams like IELTS and TOEFL. You will learn about essay structure, how to interpret essay tasks, and strategies for developing strong, coherent arguments. The chapter also covers common pitfalls non-native writers face and how to avoid them. By the end of this chapter, you will have a clear understanding of what examiners look for and how to approach different essay types.

Understanding the Essay Task and High-Scoring Essays

Covers: IELTS TOEFL Writing Full essay (high score) · IELTS 9 TOEFL 30 Full Essay: Compare · IELTS/TOEFL: Common Errors (#1) The Essay Task · TOEFL Essay - Question Types

This section lays the groundwork for writing successful academic essays. We begin by examining what constitutes a high-scoring essay in tests like IELTS and TOEFL. These essays demonstrate clear organization, well-developed ideas, and precise language. They directly address all parts of the prompt. A common mistake is to misunderstand or only partially address the essay task. For example, if a question asks for both advantages and disadvantages, discussing only advantages will result in a lower score. Always read the prompt carefully. Identify keywords and action verbs. Determine the scope of the essay.

Consider an IELTS Task 2 essay prompt: "Some people believe that all students should be required to learn a foreign language. Others argue it is not necessary. Discuss both views and give your own opinion." A high-scoring response would present arguments for requiring language learning, arguments against it, and then clearly state the writer's position, supported by reasons. A low-scoring essay might only discuss one side, or state an opinion without supporting it.

TOEFL independent essays often present different question types. These include Agreement/Disagreement, Preference, Multiple Choice (choose one of two or three options), and Cause/Effect.

- **Agreement/Disagreement:** You are given a statement and asked whether you agree or disagree, then to explain why. Example: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is better to study with a group than to study alone."
- **Preference:** You choose between two options and explain your choice. Example: "Some people prefer to live in a small town. Others prefer to live in a big city. Which do you prefer and why?"
- **Multiple Choice:** You select one option from a given list and justify it. Example: "Which of the following qualities is most important for a leader: intelligence, courage, or honesty? Explain your choice."
- **Cause/Effect:** You analyze the reasons for a phenomenon or its consequences. Example: "What are the main causes of stress among university students? Discuss some solutions."

For each type, the core requirement is to present a clear thesis, support it with specific examples and details, and maintain a logical flow. A strong essay directly answers the question, provides relevant details, and avoids irrelevant information. It also uses a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures accurately. Reviewing sample high-score essays reveals consistent patterns: a clear introduction with a thesis, body paragraphs each focusing on one main idea, and a concise conclusion. Pay attention to how these essays use transition words and phrases to connect ideas smoothly. This creates coherence, a vital component of a high score.

Developing Strong Arguments and Ideas

Covers: IELTS TOEFL Common Error #2: A Balanced Argument · IELTS TOEFL Writing- Essay ideas (How to build an Idea Bank)

Crafting a balanced argument is crucial for academic essays, especially in discussion-based tasks. A common error is presenting only one side of an issue, even when the prompt requires discussing multiple perspectives. For instance, if an IELTS Task 2 question asks you to "discuss both views and give your own opinion," you must dedicate substantial paragraphs to *each* side before presenting your perspective. Failing to do so results in an unbalanced argument and an incomplete response to the task. This directly impacts your score in Task Response or Task Achievement.

To build a balanced argument, identify the main arguments for and against a given topic. For example, on the topic of online education versus traditional classroom learning, you might list benefits of online learning (flexibility, accessibility) and drawbacks (lack of social interaction, self-discipline required). Similarly, for traditional learning, you would list its advantages (direct interaction, structured environment) and disadvantages (fixed schedules, commuting). Present these points fairly, using neutral language before you introduce your own opinion. When stating your opinion, ensure it is clearly supported by reasons and examples, drawing from the points you have already discussed or introducing new, relevant support.

Developing a rich "Idea Bank" is a powerful strategy for generating content quickly during timed exams. An Idea Bank is a collection of general knowledge, examples, and arguments you can adapt to various essay topics. Instead of starting from scratch for every essay, you can tap into pre-existing ideas. To build your Idea Bank:

1. **Read widely:** Follow news, current events, and academic articles on various subjects (environment, education, technology, society, health).
2. **Categorize information:** As you read, categorize interesting facts, statistics, and examples. Create mental or physical folders for topics like "Education," "Government," "Technology," "Environment," "Culture," and "Health."
3. **Formulate arguments:** For common controversial topics, think about arguments for and against. For example, for "government spending on arts," consider arguments supporting it (cultural enrichment, tourism) and opposing it (prioritizing essential services).
4. **Personalize examples:** Think about how general ideas relate to your own experiences or observations. This makes your examples more specific and compelling.

5. **Practice brainstorming:** Regularly spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming ideas for random essay prompts. Do not write the essay, just list points. This trains your mind to retrieve information quickly.

By having a ready supply of ideas, you reduce the time spent thinking of what to write and can focus more on organizing and expressing your thoughts clearly. This proactive approach significantly boosts your confidence and performance under exam conditions.

Self-Assessment and Scoring

Covers: IELTS Essay Assessment 2 · IELTS: how to assess and score a task 2 essay

Understanding how academic essays are assessed is key to improving your writing. Both IELTS and TOEFL essays are evaluated based on specific criteria. For IELTS Task 2, the four criteria are: Task Response, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Each criterion contributes equally to your overall score. TOEFL independent essays are assessed on similar dimensions, focusing on development, organization, language use, and grammar.

Let us break down the IELTS criteria:

- **Task Response:** This measures how well you address all parts of the prompt, present a clear position, and develop your ideas with relevant, well-supported points. An essay that only partially answers the question or has an unclear stance will score poorly here.
- **Coherence and Cohesion:** This refers to the logical organization of your ideas and how smoothly they connect. Coherence means your ideas are sensible and easy to follow. Cohesion involves using linking words, pronouns, and clear paragraphing to guide the reader through your essay. Each paragraph should have a clear main idea.
- **Lexical Resource:** This assesses the range and accuracy of your vocabulary. High scores require using a wide vocabulary naturally and appropriately, with few errors in word choice or form. Avoid repetitive language.
- **Grammatical Range and Accuracy:** This evaluates the variety and correctness of your grammatical structures. To score well, you need to use a mix of simple and complex sentences accurately, with minimal grammatical errors.

To effectively self-assess your essays, follow a systematic approach. After writing an essay, put it aside for a short time, then review it with an examiner's mindset.

1. **Task Response Check:** Did I answer every part of the question? Is my main argument (thesis) clear? Are my supporting points relevant and fully developed? Did I provide specific examples?
2. **Coherence and Cohesion Check:** Is the essay logically structured? Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence? Are there smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs? Do I use linking words effectively?
3. **Lexical Resource Check:** Have I used a variety of appropriate vocabulary? Are there any words I repeated too often? Could I use a more precise synonym? Are there any spelling errors?
4. **Grammatical Range and Accuracy Check:** Have I used a mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences? Are there any grammatical errors (verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles,

prepositions)? Is my punctuation correct?

Use a checklist based on these criteria. Assign yourself a provisional score for each area. Identify specific areas for improvement. For example, if you consistently make errors with articles, focus on practicing article usage in your next few essays. If your arguments lack depth, spend more time brainstorming specific examples. Regular self-assessment, combined with targeted practice, is a powerful tool for improving your essay writing skills.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- High-scoring academic essays directly address the prompt, present clear arguments, and use precise language.
- Understanding different essay question types (Agreement/Disagreement, Preference, Cause/Effect) helps tailor your response.
- A balanced argument requires discussing multiple perspectives fairly, especially when prompted to do so.
- Building an "Idea Bank" through wide reading and categorized knowledge helps generate strong content quickly.
- Essays are assessed on criteria like task response, coherence, vocabulary, and grammar.
- Systematic self-assessment using examiner criteria is essential for identifying and correcting weaknesses.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer these before moving on. Model answers are in the Answer Key at the back of this guide.

1. What are the key characteristics of a high-scoring academic essay in exams like IELTS or TOEFL?
2. Explain the difference between "coherence" and "cohesion" in essay writing.
3. Why is it important to build an "Idea Bank" for academic essay writing?
4. What are the four main assessment criteria for IELTS Task 2 essays?
5. How can a writer ensure a "balanced argument" when a prompt asks to discuss both views?

CHAPTER 2

Essay Essentials

This chapter focuses on core skills for academic essay writing. It covers understanding essay tasks, generating ideas, and structuring key parts of an essay. You will learn to write clear opening sentences and strong conclusions. The chapter also provides strategies for paraphrasing source material effectively.

You will also explore how to achieve cohesion and coherence in your writing. This includes using contrasting words to show relationships between ideas. Finally, you will master the correct use of semicolons and colons to improve sentence structure and clarity. These skills are essential for achieving high marks in academic and exam settings.

Understanding the Essay Task and Generating Ideas

Covers: IELTS/TOEFL: Common Errors (#1) The Essay Task · IELTS TOEFL Writing- Essay ideas (How to build an Idea Bank)

To write an effective academic essay, you must first fully understand the essay task. Many non-native writers lose marks by misinterpreting the prompt or failing to address all its components. Carefully analyze the question for keywords, instruction words, and any limitations on scope. Keywords identify the main topic. Instruction words, such as "discuss," "analyze," "compare and contrast," or "evaluate," tell you what to do with the topic. Pay attention to plurals or specific conditions mentioned in the prompt. For example, if a prompt asks about "advantages and disadvantages," you must cover both, not just one.

A common error is to write generally about the topic without directly answering the specific question asked. Another mistake is to present opinions without supporting evidence or examples. Always ensure your essay directly responds to every part of the prompt.

Once you understand the task, the next step is to generate ideas. An "Idea Bank" is a valuable tool for this. It is a collection of pre-researched facts, examples, and arguments related to common essay topics. Instead of brainstorming from scratch during an exam, you can draw upon prepared content. To build an Idea Bank, categorize common topics like education, environment, technology, or social issues. For each category, collect relevant statistics, historical facts, expert opinions, and real-world examples. This preparation helps you quickly access strong supporting material.

When faced with a specific essay task, you can use several brainstorming techniques to activate your Idea Bank and generate new thoughts:

- **Mind Mapping:** Start with the central topic, then branch out with sub-topics, ideas, and examples. This visual method helps connect related thoughts.
- **Free Writing:** Write continuously for a set period (for example, 5 to 10 minutes) without stopping, editing, or worrying about grammar. The goal is to get all your thoughts down on paper.
- **Listing:** Simply list all ideas that come to mind related to the prompt. You can organize them later into main points and supporting details.

Practice Cue

Analyze the following essay prompt: "Some people believe that all university students should be required to study a foreign language. Others argue that it is not necessary. Discuss both views and give your own opinion." Identify the keywords, instruction words, and what specific elements you must cover. Then, spend 10 minutes brainstorming ideas for both sides of the argument, considering examples from your Idea Bank or general knowledge.

Crafting Effective Paragraphs: Openings, Conclusions, and Paraphrasing

Covers: How to Paraphrase · Writing Quick Tip: The Opening Sentence · How to Write a Strong Conclusion for IELTS / TOEFL

Clear and well-structured paragraphs are fundamental to academic writing. This includes strong opening sentences for body paragraphs and effective conclusions for the entire essay. Also, the ability to paraphrase accurately is crucial for integrating source material while avoiding plagiarism.

The Opening Sentence

Each body paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence. This sentence states the main idea of that specific paragraph and acts as a mini-thesis for the paragraph. It should be direct and specific, signaling to the reader what the paragraph will discuss. Avoid vague or overly broad statements. A strong opening sentence connects back to your overall thesis statement and introduces the particular argument or evidence that the paragraph will develop. For example, instead of starting with "Many people think about education," a better opening sentence might be, "One significant advantage of online learning is its flexibility for students with diverse schedules."

How to Paraphrase

Paraphrasing involves restating someone else's ideas or information in your own words. It is essential for demonstrating your understanding of a source and for avoiding plagiarism. Simply changing a few words in a sentence is not sufficient; you must rephrase the entire idea. Follow these steps for effective paraphrasing:

1. **Read and Understand:** Read the original text multiple times until you fully grasp its meaning and the author's main point.
2. **Put it Away:** Set aside the original text. Try to explain the idea in your own words without looking at the source.
3. **Write Your Version:** Write your paraphrase, focusing on using different vocabulary and sentence structures. Change the order of ideas or combine sentences if it makes sense.
4. **Check and Compare:** Compare your paraphrase with the original text. Ensure you have not copied phrases or sentences directly and that your version accurately reflects the original meaning. Make sure to cite the source.

Original: "The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has raised concerns among some economists regarding potential job displacement in various industries."

Weak Paraphrase: "Fast progress in AI has caused worries for some economists about possible job loss in many sectors."

Strong Paraphrase: "Some economists are concerned that as artificial intelligence develops quickly, it could lead to job losses across different industries."

Writing a Strong Conclusion

A strong conclusion effectively wraps up your essay without introducing new information. It should leave the reader with a clear understanding of your argument's significance. A good conclusion typically has three parts:

1. **Summary of Main Points:** Briefly remind the reader of the key arguments you presented in your body paragraphs.
2. **Restatement of Thesis:** Rephrase your original thesis statement in new words. Do not simply copy it. Show how your arguments have supported this thesis.
3. **Final Thought:** Offer a broader implication, a prediction, a recommendation, or a call to action related to your topic. This adds depth and leaves a lasting impression.

Practice Cue

1. Paraphrase the following sentence: "Climate change is primarily caused by human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, which releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere." Aim for a significant change in wording and sentence structure.
2. For an essay arguing that social media has a negative impact on mental health, write a strong opening sentence for a body paragraph discussing cyberbullying. Then, write a concluding paragraph for the entire essay.

Achieving Cohesion and Coherence

Covers: Cohesion & Coherence in Essay Writing · Contrasting: whereas, while, although, even though, but, yet

Cohesion and coherence are two vital qualities that make academic writing clear and easy to understand. While often used together, they refer to distinct aspects of text flow.

Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical links that connect different parts of a text. It is about how sentences and paragraphs are tied together at the surface level. Cohesive devices include:

- **Pronouns:** Using "it," "they," "this," or "these" to refer back to previously mentioned nouns.
- **Repetition of Key Terms:** Repeating important words or synonyms to maintain focus.
- **Transition Words and Phrases:** Words like "however," "therefore," "in addition," "for example," which signal relationships between ideas.
- **Conjunctions:** Words like "and," "but," "or," "so" that join clauses.

Coherence, on the other hand, refers to the logical organization and clear connection of ideas in a text. It is about the overall sense and meaning, ensuring that the argument makes sense as a whole and is easy for the reader to follow. A coherent essay has a clear thesis, logical paragraph order, and ideas that develop

progressively. Cohesion contributes to coherence, but a text can be cohesive (linked by words) yet lack coherence (lack logical flow). For example, a paragraph might use many transition words but discuss unrelated ideas, making it cohesive but not coherent.

Using Contrasting Words

Using contrasting words effectively is a key aspect of both cohesion and coherence. These words help you show relationships between opposing ideas, acknowledge counterarguments, or highlight differences. Each word has a slightly different nuance and grammatical use:

- **Whereas** and **While**: These are often used to show a direct contrast between two clauses or ideas, especially when comparing two subjects. They typically introduce a subordinate clause. For example: "Some students prefer online courses, *whereas* others thrive in traditional classroom settings." "*While* the first experiment yielded positive results, the second one was inconclusive."
- **Although** and **Even though**: These introduce a concession, meaning a statement that seems to contradict the main clause but does not prevent it from being true. "Even though" is often stronger than "although." For example: "*Although* the economy is improving, unemployment remains a concern." "*Even though* she studied for weeks, she still felt nervous before the exam."
- **But** and **Yet**: These are coordinating conjunctions used to connect two contrasting independent clauses. "Yet" often implies a stronger or more surprising contrast. For example: "He tried his best, *but* he did not succeed." "The task was challenging, *yet* she completed it with determination."

Understanding these differences allows you to express complex relationships between ideas with precision.

Practice Cue

1. Rewrite the following sentences using a different contrasting word from the list, ensuring the meaning remains the same: "*Although* it was raining, they decided to go for a walk." (Try using 'despite this,' or 'however,' or 'even so' to rephrase the idea). "The cost of living is high in the city, *whereas* rural areas offer more affordable housing." (Try using 'but' or 'while' to rephrase).
2. Read a paragraph from an academic article. Identify the cohesive devices used (pronouns, transition words, repetition). Then, evaluate its coherence: Do the ideas flow logically? Is the main point clear?

Mastering Punctuation for Clarity

Covers: Punctuation: the Semicolon (;) & Colon (:))

Correct punctuation is vital for clarity and precision in academic writing. Misusing punctuation can confuse your reader and alter the meaning of your sentences. This section focuses on two important punctuation marks: the semicolon and the colon.

The Semicolon (;)

The semicolon serves two primary functions:

1. **Connecting Closely Related Independent Clauses:** Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses (complete sentences) that are closely related in meaning but are not connected by a coordinating conjunction (for example, and, but, or, so). This creates a smoother flow between ideas than using a period.
 - *Example:* "The research showed promising results; further studies are needed to confirm the findings."
 - *Example:* "She enjoys reading historical novels; her brother prefers science fiction."
2. **Separating Items in a Complex List:** When items in a list already contain commas, use semicolons to separate the main items. This prevents confusion about where one item ends and the next begins.
 - *Example:* "The conference speakers included Dr. Anya Sharma, a renowned linguist; Professor Ben Carter, an expert in cognitive science; and Ms. Clara Davies, a specialist in educational technology."

Common Semicolon Errors:

- Using a semicolon to connect an independent clause with a dependent clause. A semicolon requires two independent clauses.
- Using a semicolon where a comma would suffice to separate items in a simple list.

The Colon (:)

The colon also has specific uses that enhance clarity and structure:

1. **Introducing a List:** Use a colon to introduce a list of items, especially after a complete sentence.
 - *Example:* "The essay requires several components: an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion."
2. **Introducing an Explanation or Elaboration:** Use a colon to introduce a word, phrase, or clause that explains, clarifies, or elaborates on the preceding independent clause.
 - *Example:* "There was only one solution to the problem: compromise."
 - *Example:* "She revealed her true motivation: she wanted to help others."
3. **Introducing a Quotation:** Use a colon to introduce a formal quotation, especially a long one or one that is preceded by a complete sentence.
 - *Example:* "The author made a clear statement: 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'"

Common Colon Errors:

- Using a colon after an incomplete sentence or directly after a verb or preposition. The part before the colon must be a complete independent clause.
- *Incorrect:* "My favorite colors are: blue, green, and yellow."
- *Correct:* "My favorite colors are blue, green, and yellow."
- *Correct:* "I have three favorite colors: blue, green, and yellow."

Practice Cue

1. Insert semicolons or colons where appropriate in the following sentences:
 - The team faced numerous challenges a tight deadline limited resources and unexpected technical issues.
 - She loved classical music he preferred jazz.
 - The research focused on three main areas climate change sustainable energy and biodiversity loss.
 - His advice was simple practice daily.
2. Rewrite the following sentence to correctly use a colon: "The recipe calls for butter, sugar, and flour."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Deconstruct essay prompts carefully to address all parts of the question.
- Develop an Idea Bank to quickly generate relevant content for essays.
- Craft clear topic sentences and strong conclusions to frame your arguments.
- Paraphrase sources accurately to avoid plagiarism and demonstrate understanding.
- Ensure your writing has cohesion (links) and coherence (logical flow) for clarity.
- Use contrasting words like "whereas" and "although" to show relationships between ideas.
- Master semicolons and colons to improve sentence structure and precision.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer these before moving on. Model answers are in the Answer Key at the back of this guide.

1. What are two common errors non-native writers make when addressing an essay task?
2. Explain the difference between cohesion and coherence in academic writing.
3. When is it appropriate to use a semicolon? Provide an example.
4. What is the primary purpose of a strong conclusion in an academic essay?
5. Briefly describe the process of effective paraphrasing.

CHAPTER 3

Essay Essentials

This chapter builds on foundational writing skills, focusing on precision and analytical depth crucial for academic essays. We begin by refining your command of subject-verb agreement, a common area for error that can undermine clarity and formality in your writing. Mastering this grammatical rule ensures your sentences are consistently accurate and professional. Following this, we apply these refined skills to a specific academic context: analyzing reasons and impacts in IELTS essays. You will learn strategies for developing well-supported arguments and structuring your responses to achieve high scores, particularly focusing on the coherence and logical progression expected at a Band 9 level.

Subject-Verb Agreement: Ensuring Grammatical Accuracy

Covers: Writing: Subject - Verb Agreement (video, 17 min)

Subject-verb agreement is a fundamental rule in English grammar. It states that a singular subject must take a singular verb, and a plural subject must take a plural verb. Errors in agreement can make your writing seem unprofessional and unclear. For academic essays, precision in grammar is essential for conveying your ideas effectively.

Let us review the basic principle. If the subject is "student" (singular), the verb is "writes" (singular). If the subject is "students" (plural), the verb is "write" (plural). While this seems straightforward, several situations commonly cause confusion.

One common pitfall involves *intervening phrases*. These are words or phrases that come between the subject and the verb. They do not change the number of the subject. For example: "The *list* of required readings *is* extensive." Here, "list" is the singular subject, not "readings." The phrase "of required readings" simply describes the list. Always identify the true subject before choosing the verb.

Collective nouns can also be tricky. Words like "team," "committee," "family," "audience," or "government" can be singular or plural depending on context. If the group acts as a single unit, use a singular verb: "The *committee has* approved the proposal." If the members of the group are acting individually, use a plural verb: "The *committee are* debating among themselves." In academic writing, treating collective nouns as singular is often preferred unless individual actions are strongly emphasized.

Indefinite pronouns require careful attention. Pronouns such as "each," "every," "either," "neither," "one," "no one," "nobody," "anyone," "anybody," "someone," and "somebody" are always singular and take singular verbs. "Each of the students *has* submitted their essay." Conversely, "both," "few," "many," and "several" are always plural. Some indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural depending on what they refer to: "all," "any," "most," "none," and "some." For example, "Some of the water *is* gone" (water is uncountable, so singular). "Some of the students *are* absent" (students are countable, so plural).

When two or more subjects are joined by "and," they usually form a plural subject: "*The professor and the students are* discussing the topic." However, if they refer to a single person or idea, use a singular verb: "*Bread and butter is* a common breakfast." When subjects are joined by "or" or "nor," the verb agrees with the subject closest to it: "Neither the students nor *the professor is* ready." "Neither the professor nor *the students are* ready."

Sentences beginning with "there is/are" or "here is/are" can also cause errors. The true subject follows the verb. "There *are* many reasons for this problem." "Here *is* the main point." Always identify the noun that follows "there" or "here" to determine verb agreement.

Finally, be aware of subjects that appear plural but are singular, such as "news," "mathematics," "economics," "measles," or "politics." "The *news is* alarming." Similarly, some subjects appear singular but are plural, like "people," "police," or "cattle." "*People are* concerned about the environment." Regularly reviewing your writing for subject-verb agreement ensures clarity and grammatical precision.

Practice Cue: Take a paragraph from an essay you have written. Identify each subject and its corresponding verb. Check for correct agreement. Pay special attention to intervening phrases and indefinite pronouns.

Structuring Band 9 IELTS Essays: Reasons and Impacts

Covers: IELTS Essay (Band 9) Reasons and Impacts (video, 14 min) · IELTS Essay (Band 9) Reasons and Impacts (video, 14 min)

Many IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 prompts ask you to discuss the reasons for a phenomenon and its subsequent impacts. Achieving a Band 9 requires not just identifying reasons and impacts, but developing them logically, supporting them clearly, and presenting them in a coherent, well-structured essay.

The first step is thorough brainstorming. When presented with a topic, for example, "The increasing popularity of online shopping," do not just list the first ideas that come to mind. Instead, think critically. For reasons, consider various perspectives: technological advancements, convenience, cost, variety, societal changes. For impacts, consider different areas: economy, environment, social interaction, consumer behavior. Aim for two to three distinct, well-developed reasons, each with its own set of logical impacts. Avoid superficial lists; focus on depth.

Once you have brainstormed, structure your essay clearly. A typical Band 9 structure for a "reasons and impacts" essay includes:

1. Introduction:

- Paraphrase the prompt to show understanding.
- Provide a clear thesis statement that briefly outlines the main reasons and impacts you will discuss. This sets the roadmap for the examiner.

2. Body Paragraph 1 (Reason 1 and its Impacts):

- Start with a topic sentence introducing the first main reason.
- Explain this reason in detail.

- Introduce and explain the specific impacts directly linked to this reason. Use clear linking words and phrases such as "consequently," "as a result," "this leads to," or "one significant effect is."
- Provide examples or further explanation to support your points.

3. **Body Paragraph 2 (Reason 2 and its Impacts):**

- Follow the same structure as Body Paragraph 1. Introduce the second reason, explain it, and then discuss its associated impacts. Ensure a logical flow between paragraphs.

4. **Body Paragraph 3 (Optional, for a third reason/impact or deeper analysis):**

- If you have a third strong reason and its impacts, dedicate a paragraph to it. Alternatively, this paragraph could offer a more nuanced discussion or a counter-argument if relevant to the prompt. Do not introduce too many points; quality over quantity is key.

5. **Conclusion:**

- Summarize the main reasons and impacts discussed in your body paragraphs. Do not introduce new information.
- Re-state your thesis in different words, reinforcing your overall argument.

Language for cause and effect is vital. Use a range of expressions:

- *Causes*: "A primary factor is...", "This is primarily due to...", "The main reason for this trend is..."
- *Effects*: "This often results in...", "Consequently, there is...", "One significant impact is...", "Such developments lead to...", "The ramifications include..."

To achieve a Band 9, ensure your ideas are fully extended and supported. Each impact should be clearly explained as a direct consequence of the stated reason. Avoid making unsupported claims. For instance, if discussing online shopping, do not just say "it affects local businesses." Explain *how*: "The convenience and often lower prices of online retailers lead to reduced foot traffic in physical stores, consequently causing a decline in sales for local businesses and sometimes even closures." This level of detail and logical connection demonstrates sophisticated analytical skills.

Practice Cue: Choose an IELTS essay prompt that asks for reasons and impacts. Brainstorm two distinct reasons and their corresponding impacts. Then, write a detailed outline for a three-body-paragraph essay, ensuring clear topic sentences and logical connections between reasons and their effects.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Subject-verb agreement requires singular subjects to take singular verbs and plural subjects to take plural verbs.
- Intervening phrases do not alter the number of the subject; always identify the true subject.
- Collective nouns and indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural depending on context or the specific word.
- When subjects are joined by "or" or "nor," the verb agrees with the subject closest to it.
- IELTS essays discussing reasons and impacts require clear brainstorming of distinct, well-developed points.
- A Band 9 essay structure includes a clear thesis, body paragraphs for each reason and its impacts, and a summarizing conclusion.
- Use varied language for cause and effect to enhance coherence and demonstrate a strong vocabulary.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer these before moving on. Model answers are in the Answer Key at the back of this guide.

1. Explain the basic rule of subject-verb agreement.
2. How do intervening phrases affect subject-verb agreement?
3. What is the main purpose of the thesis statement in an IELTS essay discussing reasons and impacts?
4. Describe a common structural approach for a body paragraph in an IELTS 'reasons and impacts' essay aiming for a Band 9.
5. Why is it important to use varied language for cause and effect in an IELTS essay?

REFERENCE

Glossary

Band 9 (ielts)

The highest possible score in the IELTS examination, indicating an expert user of English with full operational command of the language.

Coherence

The logical organization and clarity of ideas within an essay, making it easy to understand.

Cohesion

The way sentences and paragraphs are linked together using linguistic devices (e.g., transition words, pronouns) to create a smooth flow.

Collective noun

A noun that refers to a group of individuals (e.g., team, committee), which can take a singular or plural verb depending on whether the group acts as one unit or as separate individuals.

Colon

A punctuation mark (:) used to introduce a list, an explanation, or a quotation.

Essay task

The specific instructions and prompt that define what an essay should address and how it should be structured.

Grammatical range and accuracy

The variety and correctness of grammatical structures employed in writing.

Idea bank

A collection of general knowledge, examples, and arguments prepared in advance to be used in various essays.

Indefinite pronoun

A pronoun that does not refer to a specific person or thing (e.g., each, all, some, nobody), which can be singular, plural, or context-dependent for verb agreement.

Intervening phrase

A group of words, such as a prepositional phrase, that comes between a subject and its verb but does not affect the subject's grammatical number.

Lexical resource

The range and accuracy of vocabulary used in an essay.

Paraphrasing

Expressing someone else's ideas or words in your own words without changing the original meaning, to avoid plagiarism.

Semicolon

A punctuation mark (;) used to connect two closely related independent clauses or to separate items in a complex list.

Subject-verb agreement

The grammatical rule that requires a verb to match its subject in number, meaning singular subjects take singular verbs and plural subjects take plural verbs.

Task response (ielts)

How effectively an essay addresses all parts of the prompt, presents a clear position, and supports it.

Thesis statement

The main argument or point of view of an essay, usually stated in the introduction.

Topic sentence

The main sentence of a paragraph that states the paragraph's central idea or argument.

REFERENCE

Answer Key

Chapter 1: Academic Essay Overview

1. What are the key characteristics of a high-scoring academic essay in exams like IELTS or TOEFL?

High-scoring essays fully address the prompt, maintain a clear and consistent thesis, and present well-developed arguments with specific supporting details. They also demonstrate effective organization, a wide range of accurate vocabulary, and varied, correct grammatical structures.

2. Explain the difference between "coherence" and "cohesion" in essay writing.

Coherence refers to the logical flow of ideas and arguments, ensuring the essay makes sense as a whole. Cohesion refers to the linguistic links between sentences and paragraphs, achieved through transition words, pronouns, and repetition of key ideas, making the text smooth and connected.

3. Why is it important to build an "Idea Bank" for academic essay writing?

Building an Idea Bank helps writers quickly generate relevant content and examples for various essay topics, especially under timed exam conditions. It reduces the need to brainstorm from scratch, allowing more focus on structuring arguments and refining language. This proactive preparation enhances confidence and efficiency.

4. What are the four main assessment criteria for IELTS Task 2 essays?

The four main assessment criteria for IELTS Task 2 essays are Task Response, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Each criterion is equally weighted in determining the overall score.

5. How can a writer ensure a "balanced argument" when a prompt asks to discuss both views?

To ensure a balanced argument, a writer must dedicate substantial and fair discussion to each perspective requested by the prompt. This means presenting arguments for both sides with equal depth and supporting details before offering a personal opinion, if required. Failing to do so results in an incomplete or biased response.

Chapter 2: Essay Essentials

1. What are two common errors non-native writers make when addressing an essay task?

Two common errors are misinterpreting keywords in the prompt and failing to address all parts of the question. Writers might also provide insufficient detail or stray from the main topic, leading to lower marks.

2. Explain the difference between cohesion and coherence in academic writing.

Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical links within a text, like using pronouns or transition words, to make sentences and paragraphs connect smoothly. Coherence, on the other hand, is about

the logical flow of ideas and the overall understandability of the text, ensuring the argument makes sense as a whole.

3. When is it appropriate to use a semicolon? Provide an example.

A semicolon is appropriate to connect two closely related independent clauses that could stand alone as sentences. For example: "The weather was terrible; we decided to stay indoors." It is also used to separate items in a complex list that already contain commas.

4. What is the primary purpose of a strong conclusion in an academic essay?

The primary purpose of a strong conclusion is to summarize the main points of the essay and restate the thesis in new words. It should also offer a final thought, such as an implication or recommendation, leaving the reader with a clear understanding of the argument's significance.

5. Briefly describe the process of effective paraphrasing.

To paraphrase effectively, first read the original text carefully to fully understand its meaning. Then, rephrase the ideas in your own words, using different vocabulary and sentence structures, without altering the original message. Finally, compare your paraphrase to the original to ensure accuracy and avoid accidental plagiarism.

Chapter 3: Essay Essentials

1. Explain the basic rule of subject-verb agreement.

The basic rule of subject-verb agreement is that a singular subject must be paired with a singular verb, and a plural subject must be paired with a plural verb. This fundamental rule ensures grammatical accuracy and clarity in sentences, which is crucial for academic writing.

2. How do intervening phrases affect subject-verb agreement?

Intervening phrases, such as prepositional phrases, appear between the subject and the verb. They do not change the number of the actual subject. To ensure correct verb agreement, you must identify the true subject, ignoring these phrases, and match the verb to that subject.

3. What is the main purpose of the thesis statement in an IELTS essay discussing reasons and impacts?

The main purpose of the thesis statement in such an essay is to clearly state the primary reasons and impacts that will be discussed. It acts as a concise roadmap for the reader, outlining the essay's main argument and providing a clear direction for the subsequent body paragraphs.

4. Describe a common structural approach for a body paragraph in an IELTS 'reasons and impacts' essay aiming for a Band 9.

A common and effective approach is to dedicate each body paragraph to one main reason. The paragraph should begin with a clear topic sentence introducing that reason, then explain the reason in detail, and subsequently discuss its specific, logically linked impacts. Supporting examples or further explanation should be included to develop the points fully.

5. Why is it important to use varied language for cause and effect in an IELTS essay?

Using varied language for cause and effect (e.g., "leads to," "results in," "consequently," "due to") is important because it demonstrates a wider range of vocabulary and improves the coherence of your

arguments. It helps to clearly articulate the relationships between ideas and avoids repetition, contributing to a higher overall score.

CLOSING

Where to Go Next

After completing this course, immediately apply the skills you have learned. Practice writing different types of academic essays regularly. Seek feedback on your work from peers or instructors. Consistent application is key to making these skills permanent.

Consider exploring advanced academic writing topics or courses focused on specific essay types, such as research papers or literature reviews. Further study in academic research methods can also complement these foundational writing skills. Continue to read widely in academic texts to observe effective writing in practice.



MEGACOURSE

Learn Anything. Achieve Everything.

Track your progress, take the quizzes, and earn your certificate for this course at
megacourse.app/courses/academic-essay-writing-for-english-learners