

# 1.2



## UNDERSTANDING THE TASK 1 QUESTION

General Task 1 questions are made up of 3 different parts (please see below). The first is usually 1 sentence long and gives some background information on why the letter is being written. The second part instructs the student to write a letter and often indicates the nature and tone the student is expected to display. The third part of the question shares specific details that the student must elaborate upon. It is important that the student completely understands each section of the question to ensure their answer fulfills it properly.

Background info	{	<b><i>You have tickets for a sports event but won't be able to attend.</i></b>
Instruction words	{	<b><i>Write a letter to a friend offering them the tickets. In your letter, include:</i></b>
Letter details	{	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b><i>how you got the tickets</i></b></li><li>• <b><i>why you can't attend</i></b></li><li>• <b><i>why you think your friend will enjoy the event</i></b></li></ul>

Even though your question may be on any number of topics, you will most likely need to write one of the following six letter types:

- 1. A letter of request***
- 2. A letter of condolence***
- 3. A letter of appreciation***
- 4. A letter of advice, feedback or suggestion***
- 5. A letter of apology***
- 6. A letter of complaint***

Although a common letter structure is used to respond to all 6 letter types, the lexical resources and tone employed in each varies greatly.

## 1.3



### THE IMPORTANCE OF TONE

In addition to letter types, it is important your letter expresses the right tone. This will be based entirely on the relationship you have with the person you are writing to. There are 2 basic tones you will need to be able to express before engaging your exam: formal and informal.

Although entire books have been written on the differences between formal and informal English, the basics of these styles can be condensed into a few specific qualities:

#### Formal English

- does not make use of contractions (i.e. can't, won't, haven't)
- avoids colloquialisms and never uses slang
- taps into more complicated lexical resources and wording styles
- uses passive sentence constructions, making it more professional and less personal

#### Informal English

- permits the use of contractions
- delivers a message in a personal tone and often uses colloquialisms to do so
- uses contextually accurate lexical resources but does not need to deliver these in an overly complicated manner
- uses more active sentence constructions

For example, if you were the manager of a company and needed to write a letter announcing to a small group of your employees that they were going to lose their jobs, you would most likely write a letter of condolence in a formal tone. However, if you were writing a letter to a friend who had just lost a loved one, your letter would be consoling, yet informal.

So to illustrate the above in action, let's say that we were asked to write a letter to a company requesting they reissue the documentation needed for one of their products. Look at the two manners in which we could construct the opening to this letter:

### Sample 1

*I am writing to request a reissue of the documentation that comes with your GDX 93 model coffee maker. Please allow me to describe my circumstances.*

### Sample 2

*I hope you and your team are doing well. You'll never guess what happened to me the other day. I misplaced the documentation for my GDX 93 model coffee maker! I am writing to see if you would mind reissuing it to me.*

I am sure it is clear from these examples that instance 2 is simply too informal to be used in a letter addressed to a company. Thus, writing in this manner would be detrimental to the Task Achievement portion of a student's mark.

Now let's pretend we were asked to write a letter thanking a close friend for a party they hosted the week prior. Look at the following examples and decide which opening would better fit this circumstance:

### Sample 1

*Please allow this letter to act as my gesture of thanks on behalf of my wife and I for the lovely evening you hosted last week.*

### Sample 2

*My wife and I would like to thank you for the wonderful party you threw last week.*

As the recipient of our letter is a friend, we want our words to be affable and endearing, and this is difficult to accomplish using the formal example 1 above. Thus, the friendlier second example would be a better choice.

As the above illustrates, the quality of your tone is a very important element in your letter and must be delivered correctly for you to be successful on the exam.

# 1.4



## LETTER STRUCTURE EXPLAINED

Although the purpose and tone of your IELTS letter may vary, the structure you will follow will not. Because letters address their reader directly, they are structured in a manner that allows them to be extremely concise without sacrificing courtesy.

A complete letter has five parts. You should skip a line between each to ensure it is clear where one part finishes and another begins. The five parts of a letter are:

1. *The salutation*
2. *The statement of purpose*
3. *The situational details*
4. *The statement of request*
5. *The farewell*

1. The salutation is the greeting portion of the letter. On the IELTS exam, this portion will be written for you. Common salutations you will see on your exam are:

*To whom it may concern,*

*Dear Sir or Madam,*

2. The statement of purpose is the short paragraph that you will write to tell your reader why you are writing. This section is typically only 1 or 2 sentences long.
3. The situational details paragraph is the portion of the letter where you will expand and explain the particulars of your position to your reader.
4. The statement of request is the part of the letter where you declare what you hope will be accomplished as a result of your writing.

5. The farewell is the few words you write to close your letter. Tailoring your farewell to the subject of your letter is an additional way to demonstrate your lexical abilities in English to your examiner. Some example farewells are:

*Gratefully yours,*

*Looking forward to your response,*

*Give my regards to...*

*Best wishes,*

*All the best,*

*See you soon,*

To demonstrate these parts in action, please look at the following letter:

Part 1 { Dear Sir/Madam,

Part 2 { I am a third year history student and am writing to you regarding a problem I regularly encounter when I visit the assignment submission desk in the Lorne Building.

Part 3 { Although the Lorne Building is a beautiful and historical campus landmark, it does not provide access to disabled students. As the assignment submission desk is on the ninth floor of the building, my classmate, who is in a wheelchair, is unable to access it. This means that whenever he wishes to hand in an assignment, he must request a classmate do it for him. This, as I am sure you can understand, is both tedious and embarrassing for him.

Part 4 { My friend is much too proud to contact you directly, so I am writing on his behalf. I am requesting that you promptly alter this building in a manner that allows disabled students to access college resources as conveniently as everyone else. Perhaps this could best be accomplished through the installation of an elevator.

Part 5 { I look forward to hearing back from you soon,  
Ryan

As you can see, each of the five parts of the letter carries out a specific job. The end result is a cohesive piece of work that delivers a message in a concise manner.

Regarding length, often students think writing extremely long responses of 200 or more words is a strategy that will impress their examiner. This is not the case. Being concise and demonstrating to your examiner that you can express yourself completely in very few words is a better display of your English mastery. Thus, in the lead up to your exam, practice writing in a manner that produces responses of 150 to 170 words. This strategy will also help you conserve time.