

IELTS Letter Writing Tips

1. **Identify the type of letter** you are being asked to write. Is it a formal, semi-formal or informal letter? The entire tone of your letter is based on your answer to this question. Adjust your style and choice of words according to the type of letter you have been asked to write.

2. **Open and close the letter correctly.** Remember that each type of letter requires a different opening and closing. The chart below will help you remember this:

Style	Characteristics	Opening	Ending
Formal	To someone you have not met, whose name you don't know	Dear Sir / Madam	Yours faithfully
Semi-formal	To someone you may or may not have met, whose last name you know & use	Dear Mr Brown, Dear Ms Stone	Yours sincerely
Informal	To someone you know well, whose first name you know and use	Dear John Dear Anita	Best regards Warm wishes

3. Open a formal and semi-formal letter with a formal sentence. Don't try to be friendly, as you do not know the person you are writing to. Get right down to business and indicate the reason you are writing, as shown below:

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to inquire about / I am writing in connection with...

Dear Mr Jones,

I am writing to inform you ... / I am writing in connection with...

4. Open an informal letter with a general, friendly paragraph. With friends whom we know, we care about the whole person. We have a broader relationship in the context of which this communication is taking place. So it is best to acknowledge that friendship first, before getting down to the reason for your letter. In fact, the first paragraph could be purely friendly small talk, unrelated to the reason for your writing. Look at the example below:

Dear Jane

I hope you and your family are all well. It was such a pleasure to see you again last summer. We sure had a great time catching up with each other after so many years. You have always been a cherished friend, no matter how much of a gap there has been since we met.

Anyway, the reason I'm writing is that I have some good news - I am getting married this summer...

5. Identify the main purpose of the letter. Are you asking for help, apologizing, inviting someone, complaining or thanking someone? Learn appropriate and polite expressions that will support what you need to say.

6. Learn and use standard written phrases. Students sometimes struggle to finish their writing in time. This happens when you are trying to write every sentence from scratch. The fact is, in conventional letter writing in English, we use a number of standard expressions and phrases and add on to them the specific information we wish to communicate. By learning how to use these expressions,

you will find the letter writing task much easier and will never have to fight for time.

7. Make sure you write at least 150 words. Practice writing letters till you know what 150 words feel like and look like. You will lose marks if you write less. You will not lose marks if you write more; the only restriction on writing more is in terms of time, not the number of words.

8. Learn the correct spelling of commonly used words. It is surprising how many IELTS students make a mistake when spelling words such as "sincerely", "faithfully", "in connection with" and so on. You can prevent yourself from losing marks by learning the correct spelling of these words and expressions which you are highly likely to use on your exam.

9. Stay on topic. In order to complete your letter within 20 minutes or less, practice writing letters where you stick to the point. The General IELTS Task 1 does require you to make up a bit of a story to complete your letter, but don't make your story so complicated that you run out of time.

10. Include all three bulleted points. If you exclude even one of the points given to you in the question prompt, you will lose valuable marks. Practice writing letters that include the three points and go back and check that you have included them in each practice exercise you do.