IGNORANCE OF IELTS WRITING MARKING CRITERIA AND ITS EFFECT ON SCORE

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Abstract. This article deals with the ignorance of IELTS Writing marking criteria, problems arising from this for the candidates and its effect on the Writing score. Also, a detailed information and explanation about assessment criteria will be highlighted. They will be supported with solid reasons as well as examples.

Keywords: writing, assessment criteria, task achievement, coherence, linking words, vocabulary, synonyms, grammar structures, errors.

Introduction.

These days, the importance of English is very controversial all around the world, so more and more people are spending time for learning this language. If a person wants to work in a job with a high salary or plan to study in abroad, English proficiency certificates such as IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC are required. Therefore, preparing for these kinds of testing systems is becoming common among people, especially among youth. These tests are designed to evaluate four kinds of skills of the language learners. These are Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. All of these sections have their own goals, features and their own structure. Having said this, students are facing with many difficulties in the process of acquiring these skills and making some mistakes in this process. One of them is the ignorance of Writing assessment criteria. In this article, main problems from this will be highlighted in a detailed way as well as the importance and structure of the Writing marking criteria will be explained fully.

Main body

IELTS Writing section involves two main parts: Task 1 and Task 2 and one hour is given for completing them. Task 1 is about giving full descriptions for the various reports like pictures of the maps, processes or a wide range of analytical graphs. Candidates are required to write 150 words for this one. In comparison, Task 2 comprises from an essay writing on one given topic and word limit is 250 words. After the exam, all of the Writing answer sheets are checked according to the marking criteria and then scores are given. However, many candidates are not informed about real assessment criteria and this is leading major problems. One of the most major one is that if people, who are preparing for IELTS, are not informed about assessment criteria, they will not be able to develop their writing skills according to a clear guidance. Simply put, in order to get a high score in the IELTS writing exam, students should know exactly what the examiner wants. Understanding assessment criteria well will be the first step to success. Because if students have comprehension about this, they can mainly focus on enhancing the right techniques and skills for the writing exam. But without an accurate direction or without being informed about this, they are likely to learn less or in an inappropriate way, despite the fact that they may use different sources for the improvement. This, as a result, lead them to write essays which cannot answer to the requirements of marking fully which will lower Writing band score.

As for the solution, the best way is definitely looking through all criteria and analyzing them fully with examples before the preparation for the writing part. In detail, there are four types of criteria for Writing. They are almost similar for Task 1 and Task 2. These are:

Task achievement (TA) or Task response (TR)

Coherence and Cohesion (CC)

Lexical Resource (LR)

Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA)

Each criterion has their own function and candidates' work are checked according to their four different requirements and scores are calculated using them. That's why, all criteria's characteristics should be learned in detail:

Task achievement (for task 1) and Task response (for task 2) – it is about writing a task (essay) on topic – not out of topic; organizing an accurate structure for introduction, body 1, body 2, conclusion; supporting all parts of an essay clearly using solid reasons and examples. Marks differ from each other and start from 0 to 9 points. For example, the features of 5 band score and 9 band score for Task achievement will be highlighted briefly below:

Band 5: the task will be partially addressed; overall development is not always accurate; there are some irrelevant details.

Band 9: the structure in general is well developed, examples and clear reasons are provided to support fully, all the requirements of the task are fully satisfied.

Coherence and Cohesion – there is a distinct difference between these two words. Cohesion is associated with the connection or relationship of all sentences in an essay using lexical chains or cohesive devices. Linking words also create cohesion and there are many types of linking words according to their meaning:

General explaining: in other words, to put it another way and etc.

Adding additional information: moreover, furthermore, additionally, similarly, coupled with and etc.

Demonstrating contrast: however, on the other hand, having said that, by contrast, yet and etc.

Giving examples: for instance, to give an illustration and etc.

Signifying importance: significantly, notably, importantly and etc.

Summarizing: in conclusion, above all, all things considered and etc.

In comparison, coherence refers to the connection between ideas, as all ideas should be stated in a logically correct way and as a result, meaning needs to be clear and accurate. In order to score highly in coherence and cohesion criteria, one should use a wide range of linking words to connect sentences appropriately and the relationship between ideas need to be logical and in order. The features of 5 band score and 9 band score for CC will be highlighted briefly below:

Band 5: inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices in the task (essay), there is a lack of referencing and some linking words are repetitive. Overall progression is not clear.

Band 9: paragraphing is well organized and ideas are logically sequenced. A wide range of cohesive devices are appropriately used.

Lexical resource – it is related to a vocabulary range. It is about using topic vocabularies appropriately and relevantly instead of using difficult or uncommon words all the time. The wider range of vocabulary candidates use accurately, the higher score they are likely to get for this marking type. However, there are some things which may lower the score of LR. These include

using words repeatedly, paraphrasing ineffectively or directly copying vocabularies from the exam question. Having said this, there are many tips for improving this score. Initially, using synonyms effectively which means that a wide range of words with same meaning or in other cases different meaning need to be implemented. Secondly, being aware of collocations and using them. Collocations are the words which are used together as a phrase, such as take a look or absolutely gorgeous. Lastly, instead of just copying words, they should be paraphrased correctly which is about alternatives of the words. For instance, the word "improve" can be paraphrased as "enhance". These two words have the same meaning but their forms are different.

The features of 5 band score and 9 band score for LR will be highlighted briefly below:

Band 5: there is a limited range of vocabulary, there are some obvious spelling errors, these are not adequate for the full task.

Band 9: there is a well-organized control of lexical features, a wide range of vocabulary is used naturally and appropriately.

Grammar range and accuracy – it is about using a wide variety of grammar structures clearly. It means being informed about 3 types of grammar structures and making sentences correctly according to them. These types include: simple sentences, compound sentences and complex sentences. Examples:

I did not go the university (simple sentence)

I did not go to the university and read a book during a full day (compound sentence)

I did not go to the university because I had a terrible headache (complex sentence)

If a mixture of simple, compound and complex sentences is used in a task, candidates are likely to score highly in GRA. In order to make these kinds of sentences effectively, subordinating conjunctions (while, so that, although, because), relative clauses (which, who, where, whose), if conditionals, propositional phrases should be used accurately. Making grammar mistakes lowers this criteria's score.

The features of 5 band score and 9 band score for LR will be highlighted briefly below:

Band 5: there is a limited range of structures, there are some complex sentences but with less accuracy, frequent grammar errors occur, punctuation also in not accurate.

Band 9: a wide range of grammar structures are used correctly and with full flexibility, there may be rare minor errors.

Each marking criteria contributes 25% of the score of the task. For example, if a candidate gets: 7 in task achievement, 7 in coherence and cohesion, 6.5 in lexical resource and 7.5 in grammar, his overall writing score will be: (7+7+6.5+7.5)/4 = 7. This means that test takers should perform well in all criteria in order to get a higher score for writing.

Conclusion

To conclude, knowing assessment criteria well is absolutely necessary, if a test taker wants to score highly in IELTS writing. All these criteria features ought to be analyzed and learned before preparation process or real exams. Each criteria carries the same importance and each of them has different requirements. Without being informed about all mentioned information and features, one is less likely to do well in writing.

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