

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE

IELTS Journey

Strategies for Band 7.5+ by Joe Evans
Spark English Center Vietnam

SPARK
ENGLISH CENTER

About Spark English Center Vietnam

We are an English school that provides English support for students at international schools in Ho Chi Minh City. We specialize in phonics-based ESL support for international school students in HCMC, helping children build strong English foundations so they can succeed academically and confidently.



ESL & Phonics-Based Learning

Building strong English foundations through structured phonics and ESL programs



Reading, Writing & Speaking

Developing fluency across all four language skills for academic success



Advanced Academic English

Preparing students for the academic demands of IB, British, and American curricula



IELTS & Test Preparation

Expert preparation for IELTS and other standardized English assessments

Meet Your Instructor

Joe Evans



Director and Lead IELTS Instructor
Spark English Center Vietnam, Thao Dien, Ho Chi Minh City

With over six years of specialized Academic IELTS teaching and a structured approach built on deliberate practice, personalized feedback, and proven exam strategies, Joe delivers results that speak for themselves.

95%+

of students achieve
Band 7.5 or higher

6+

years specialized
IELTS instruction

100s

of students helped
across the world

What This Guide Covers

- 1 What IELTS Academic really tests
- 2 Realistic timelines and preparation expectations
- 3 Listening strategies: paraphrasing and distractors
- 4 Reading: the 7-step keyword and synonym technique
- 5 Writing Task 1: identifying key features
- 6 Writing Task 2: essay structure and Band 8 models
- 7 Speaking: the AREE system for Band 7+
- 8 Pronunciation training for clarity
- 9 Vocabulary and collocations for Band 7+
- 10 30 / 60 / 90-day study plans and exam day tips

What IELTS Academic Really Tests

IELTS is a skills-based exam, not a knowledge-based exam. You are tested on how clearly you communicate, not what you know.

1

MEANING

Clear, logical communication of ideas.
This is the most important element.

2

ACCURACY

Correct grammar and vocabulary
usage throughout your responses.

3

FLUENCY

Smooth, natural communication
without excessive hesitation.

The Reality: How Long It Takes

From Band 4.5-5 to Band 7-7.5, most students need 6-12 months of consistent study with expert feedback. IELTS is not a test you can cram for.

Intensive (daily + feedback)

4-6 months

Typical (regular schedule)

6-12 months

Common reality (part-time)

1-2 years

You are improving your language system, not learning test tricks. Consistent effort over months is what produces real results.

Listening: Mastering Distractors

The Paraphrasing Trap

The audio rarely uses the same words as the question. If you only listen for the exact word, you will miss the answer.

cost fee / price / charge

improve enhance / get better

main primary / key

problem issue / challenge

reduce decrease / lower

begin start / commence

Distractors

Speakers often give incorrect information first, then correct it.

"The meeting was planned for Tuesday... actually, it's now Thursday."

Answer: Thursday (the corrected information)

Always Listen For:

- ✓ Corrections and self-corrections
- ✓ Final decisions, not initial suggestions
- ✓ Confirmed information only

Reading: The 7-Step Strategy

1

Identify Keywords

Focus on nouns, verbs, numbers. Ignore articles.

2

Predict Synonyms

IELTS rarely repeats words. How else could this be said?

3

Scan the Passage

Move eyes quickly. Search for keywords or synonyms.

4

Read Carefully

Once located, read 1-2 sentences for meaning.

5

Understand Q Types

T/F/NG, MCQ, summary, matching need different approaches.

6

Verify Your Answer

Does it match meaning exactly? Is it a trap?

7

Manage Time

P1: 15-18 min | P2: 18-20 min | P3: 20-25 min

Reading Success = Locate + Understand + Confirm

Writing Task 1: Key Features Strategy

Mandatory Structure

1. Introduction	Paraphrase the question
2. Overview	Key trends (MOST IMPORTANT)
3. Details Para 1	First group of data
4. Details Para 2	Second group of data

Examiners Reward

- ✓ Key trends and patterns
- ✓ Highest and lowest values
- ✓ Clear grouping and comparisons
- ✓ 2-3 significant data points

Examiners Do Not Reward

- ✗ Listing every number
- ✗ Small, insignificant changes
- ✗ Repetitive data descriptions



Joe's Golden Rule: Always include a clear overview. Without it, your band score is limited.

Writing Task 2: The Essay Framework

Introduction

Paraphrase question + state your position

5 min planning

Body Paragraph 1

Topic sentence + supporting idea + example + explanation

10 min

Body Paragraph 2

Second argument or counter-argument with development

10 min

Conclusion

Summarize position clearly. No new information.

5 min

What Makes a Band 8 Essay

- ✓ Clear position with well-developed ideas
- ✓ Logical structure with smooth progression
- ✓ Wide vocabulary: "considerable benefits," "blurred the boundaries"
- ✓ Complex grammar with high accuracy

Writing Band Descriptors

What examiners look for at each level

Band	Task Response	Coherence	Vocabulary	Grammar
5	No overview, lists data	Poor organization	Limited, repetitive	Frequent errors
6	Overview weak, some features	Clear but basic	Some range	Simple + complex
7	Clear overview + key features	Logical structure	Good range	Fewer errors
8+	Excellent selection	Smooth, flexible	Wide, precise	Very few errors

6 to 7: Add clear overview, develop ideas, improve grammar

7 to 8: Precise vocabulary, sentence variety, fewer errors

Speaking: The AREE System

The core structure for extending your answers naturally and reaching Band 7+



Answer

Give a direct, clear answer

"Yes, I enjoy reading."



Reason

Explain why with a reason

"It helps me relax and learn new things."



Example

Give a specific example

"For instance, I read books about psychology."



Explanation

Add depth and insight

"This helps me understand human behaviour."

Speaking Success = Fluency + Clarity + Development

Pronunciation: What Examiners Assess

Pronunciation is NOT about having a British or American accent. It is about being clear and natural.



Word Stress

deVELOp, eduCAtion, techNOlogy. Incorrect stress = hard to understand.



Sentence Stress

Stress nouns, verbs, adjectives. Not every word. I like to GO to the SHOP every DAY.



Intonation

Rising for questions. Falling for statements. Flat speech = Band 5-6.



Connected Speech

Natural linking: "want to" sounds like "wanna." This improves fluency.



Clarity

Be understood, not perfect. Clear and natural beats fancy and forced.

Daily 10-15 min: Read aloud (5 min) + Record yourself (5 min) + Compare with native audio (5 min)

Essential Collocations for Band 7+

Collocations are natural word combinations that make your language sound native and accurate.

Verb + Noun

- ✔ make a decision
- ✔ take responsibility
- ✔ play a role
- ✔ have an impact
- ✔ face a challenge
- ✔ solve a problem
- ✔ raise awareness
- ✔ achieve a goal
- ✔ gain experience
- ✔ reach a conclusion

Adjective + Noun

- ✔ significant increase
- ✔ serious problem
- ✔ major issue
- ✔ rapid growth
- ✔ strong argument

Sentence Transformation (Key Skill)

Technology has changed communication.



Communication has been changed by technology.

The number of students increased.



There was a significant increase in students.

Education is important.



Education plays a vital role.

Common Mistakes That Cost Band Scores

- ✘ Memorizing word lists → ✔ Learn vocabulary in collocations and use them
- ✘ Reading every word in the passage → ✔ Scan for keywords, then read targeted sections
- ✘ Giving short speaking answers → ✔ Use AREE structure to extend naturally
- ✘ No overview in Task 1 writing → ✔ Always include 2-sentence overview of key trends
- ✘ Studying without any feedback → ✔ Get expert feedback to identify blind spots
- ✘ Cramming before the exam → ✔ Study consistently: 1-3 hours daily over months

Every mistake is a learning opportunity. Track your errors, understand them, and prevent them from recurring.

Your Study Plan: 30 / 60 / 90 Days

DAYS 1-30

Foundation

- ✓ Learn test format
- ✓ Basic daily practice
- ✓ Identify weaknesses
- ✓ Build core vocabulary

DAYS 31-60

Development

- ✓ Improve writing structure
- ✓ Build grammar accuracy
- ✓ Increase speaking fluency
- ✓ Timed reading practice

DAYS 61-90

Exam Training

- ✓ Full timed mock tests
- ✓ Focus on weak areas
- ✓ Speed + accuracy drills
- ✓ Final strategy refinement

Daily 2-Hour Routine: Listening (30 min) + Reading (30 min) + Writing (40 min) + Speaking (20 min)

Exam Day and the Success Formula

During the Exam

- Listening** Write answers immediately, check spelling
- Reading** Scan, locate, answer. Do not read everything.
- Writing** Plan 5 min first. Include overview (Task 1).
- Speaking** Extend with AREE. Do not memorize.

The Success Formula

- Consistency** Study 1-3 hours daily. Build habits, not motivation.
- Deliberate Practice** Focus on weak areas. Analyze every mistake.
- Expert Feedback** Self-study alone is not enough for high scores.



"The difference between Band 6 and Band 7 is not talent. It is discipline, practice, and smart strategy. Stay focused. Stay consistent. You will succeed."

Joe Evans

*Spark English Center
Vietnam is here to
support
you at every stage of
your IELTS journey.*

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