

Support for lower English literacy students

Students for whom English is not a first language may need additional support with understanding assignments and reading as well as correcting the grammar in their writing. For them each academic task will require considerably more time to complete and the pressure on their time and mental/emotional resources will tend to be greater than for English speaking students. Accents may affect the clarity of oral presentations, contributions to class discussion and communication in general so consideration of these cultural nuances should be built in to your practice and not obscure appreciation of their ability to think and understand concepts.

For ESL students it useful to remind yourself that you are not looking for perfect grammar but rather ideas and structures so ask yourself if the ideas are coming through. This is more important than perfect grammar. While they may lose marks for editing or correct grammar this should not cloud your evaluation of other aspects of the task like structure and content unless grammar is so poor it completely interferes with clarity of ideas.

The English language levels of these students in first year will generally range from IELTS 5 to IELTS 6. (IELTS is the most widely used language testing system.) Although the official entry is 6 a number of students gain entry through VET and other means that do not require a 6. See Appendix over the page for an indication of the level of language competence you can expect from these levels and the levels of competence recommended for operating at an academic level of language (6.5 or higher). This will illustrate the considerable challenges they face with the language requirements of their study.

Beyond this time and consideration which are a normal part of supporting students' individual needs, students with lower English literacy may need also to be referred for additional support. As soon as you become aware of their need for support (normally after the first assignment has been marked) send their details to the Theme Leader for Common Units so that appropriate support can be arranged.

Note: Quick tips for supporting ESL learners will be provided for staff as a separate document.

Appendix: English language level

Levels recommended for academic courses

Band	Linguistically demanding academic courses	Linguistically less demanding academic courses	Linguistically demanding training courses	Linguistically less demanding training courses
7.5-9.0	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
7.0	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.5	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.0	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable
5.5	English study needed	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable

The appropriate level for entry to your institution is something that you decide. We will, however, provide any advice and assistance you may need.

Guidance on setting appropriate band score requirements is provided in the 'IELTS Scores Explained' DVD (available from www.ielts.org). The DVD also contains detailed descriptions of the test components, sample test materials and examples of candidates' writing and speaking performances at different band levels.

Test scores

IELTS provides a profile of a candidate's ability to use English.

Results are reported as band scores, on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 9 (the highest), as shown.

IELTS Band Scores	
9	Expert user
8	Very good user
7	Good user
6	Competent user
5	Modest user
4	Limited user
3	Extremely limited user
2	Intermittent user
1	Non user
0	Did not attempt the test

Candidates received an overall band score as well as individual scores for each test component (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking).

The IELTS Band Scores

Each band corresponds to a level of English competence.

Band 9	Expert user	has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
Band 8	Very good user	has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
Band 7	Good user	has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
Band 6	Competent user	has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
Band 5	Modest user	has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
Band 4	Limited user	basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
Band 3	Extremely limited user	conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
Band 2	Intermittent user	no real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
Band 1	Non-user	essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
Band 0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

IELTS Speaking band descriptors (public version)

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features develops topics fully and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety sustains flexible use of features throughout is effortless to understand
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language develops topics coherently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies uses paraphrase effectively as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures flexibly produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of pronunciation features sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices uses paraphrase effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies generally paraphrases successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice rarely attempts paraphrase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a limited range of pronunciation features attempts to control features but lapses are frequent mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks with long pauses has limited ability to link simple sentences gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances makes numerous errors except in memorised expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pauses lengthily before most words little communication possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only produces isolated words or memorised utterances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cannot produce basic sentence forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speech is often unintelligible
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no communication possible no rateable language 			
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> does not attend 			

IELTS Task 1 Writing band descriptors (public version)

Band	Task Achievement	Coherence and Cohesion	Lexical Resource	Grammatical Range and Accuracy
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fully satisfies all the requirements of the task clearly presents a fully developed response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention skilfully manages paragraphing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers all requirements of the task sufficiently presents, highlights and illustrates key features / bullet points clearly and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sequences information and ideas logically manages all aspects of cohesion well uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures the majority of sentences are error-free makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers the requirements of the task (Academic) presents a clear overview of main trends, differences or stages (General Training) presents a clear purpose, with the tone consistent and appropriate clearly presents and highlights key features / bullet points but could be more fully extended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a variety of complex structures produces frequent error-free sentences has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> addresses the requirements of the task (Academic) presents an overview with information appropriately selected (General Training) presents a purpose that is generally clear; there may be inconsistencies in tone presents and adequately highlights key features / bullet points but details may be irrelevant, inappropriate or inaccurate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ generally addresses the task; the format may be inappropriate in places ▪ (Academic) recounts detail mechanically with no clear overview; there may be no data to support the description ▪ (General Training) may present a purpose for the letter that is unclear at times; the tone may be variable and sometimes inappropriate ▪ presents, but inadequately covers, key features / bullet points; there may be a tendency to focus on details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression ▪ makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices ▪ may be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task ▪ may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses only a limited range of structures ▪ attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences ▪ may make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attempts to address the task but does not cover all key features / bullet points; the format may be inappropriate ▪ (General Training) fails to clearly explain the purpose of the letter; the tone may be inappropriate ▪ may confuse key features / bullet points with detail; parts may be unclear, irrelevant, repetitive or inaccurate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response ▪ uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task ▪ has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ errors may cause strain for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses ▪ some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ fails to address the task, which may have been completely misunderstood ▪ presents limited ideas which may be largely irrelevant/repetitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ does not organise ideas logically ▪ may use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses only a very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling ▪ errors may severely distort the message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ answer is barely related to the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ has very little control of organisational features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ answer is completely unrelated to the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ fails to communicate any message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ can only use a few isolated words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cannot use sentence forms at all
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ does not attend ▪ does not attempt the task in any way ▪ writes a totally memorised response 			