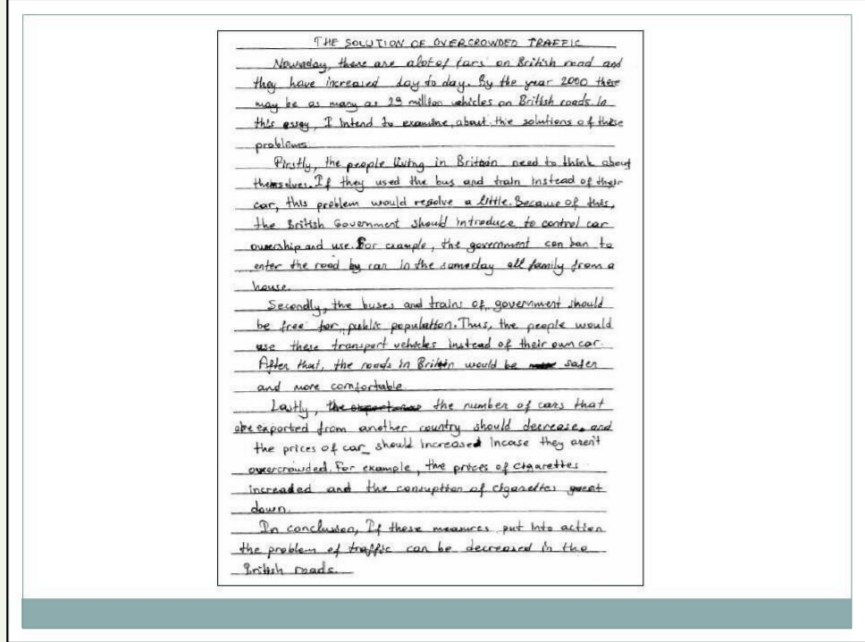


What does an IELTS 6.0 student look like ... and how can we help support these students?

Laura Haseley, Centre for Languages



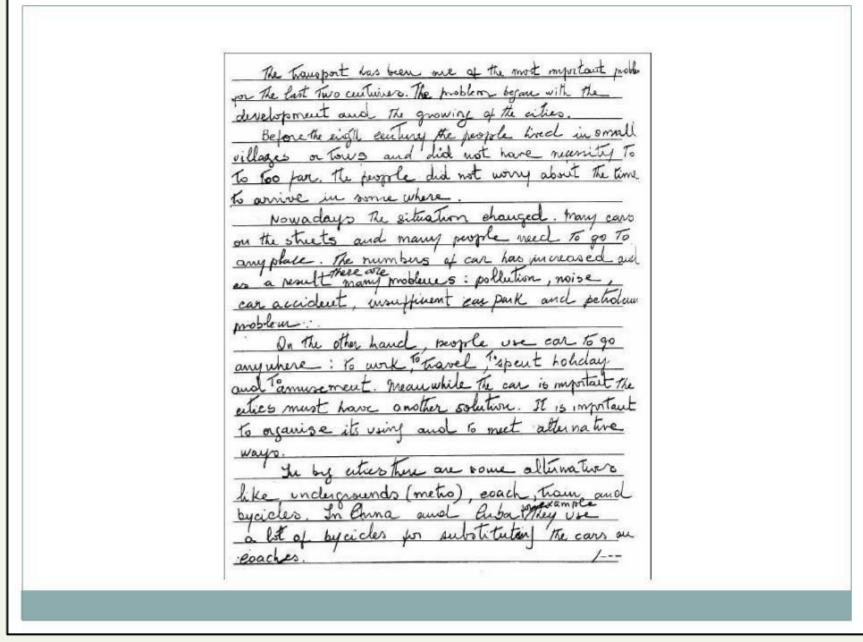
The IELTS 9-band scale

Each band corresponds to a level of English competence. All parts of the test and the Overall Band Score can be reported in whole and half bands, eg 6.5, 7.0, 7.5, 8.0.

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.



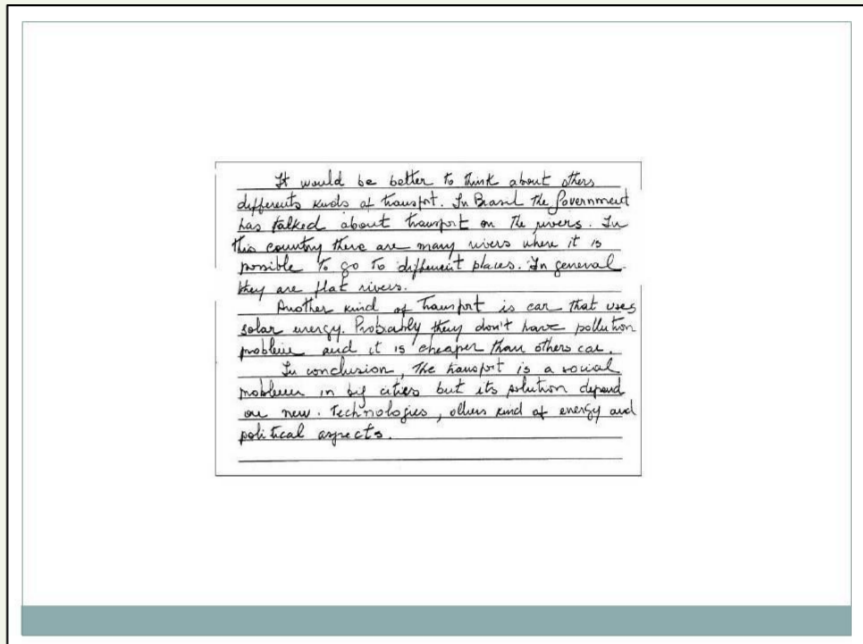
Examiner comment
Band 5.5

The answer is short at just over 200 words and thus loses marks for content. There are some relevant arguments but these are not very well developed and become unclear in places. The organisation of the answer is evident through the use of fairly simple connectives but there are problems for the reader in that there are many missing words and word order is often incorrect. The structures are quite ambitious but often faulty and vocabulary is kept quite simple.

Bridging the gap


One of the main reasons why students may be considered 'at risk' is that there is a mismatch between the level of skill, knowledge and performance expected at the beginning of a course and the student's current level in these areas. There is a traditional notion of what undergraduates ought to be able to do at entry, and an increasing number of students who, for a variety of reasons, do not match the expected profile.

Cottrell, 2001



Reasons why students do not understand what is required

- No previous contact with higher education so not familiar with the conventions of academic life, i.e. what an essay is, deadlines, attendance, critical thinking, time management, etc.)
- Different academic conventions in different countries
- Different academic conventions in different areas, so referencing, layout, academic writing styles and use of vary from subject to subject and even tutor to tutor



Examiner comment
Band 6.0

There are quite a lot of ideas and while some of these are supported better than others, there is an overall coherence to the answer. The introduction is perhaps slightly long and more time could have been devoted to answering the question. The answer is fairly easy to follow and there is good punctuation. Organisational devices are evident although some areas of the answer become unclear and would benefit from more accurate use of connectives. There are some errors in the structures but there is also evidence of the production of complex sentence forms. Grammatical errors interfere slightly with comprehension.

Be explicit about assessments

- How much time should it take you to do the assignment?
- When should you start it?
- What is the marking criteria?
- Are there exemplars of good assignments?
- What will cause you to fail (i.e. plagiarism, and to what extent)
- Be explicit about how you mark English

If we can do one thing, what should it be?

Be explicit


Be explicit about English

- Are you marking English, i.e. will a student be marked down for poor English?
→ unintended consequence of that = greater risk of plagiarism or cheating
- If you are marking English, what are you marking?
- Do you want assignments to be proof-read?
- Do you want students to improve their English during the programme?

Be explicit about your course expectations and learning

Many students don't understand where the information is supposed to come from, or indeed that they need to learn information and think critically, not just complete assignments.

What do you want from me? Explicitness unpacked



Be explicit about non-productive skills

- What reading do they need to do? Why? When?
- Can you highlight the most important pages/chapters?
- Why do they need to come to your lecture?
- How is your lecture structured?
- Can you put last year's lectures on Moodle so that the students can watch them before they come to class?
- Could you put a list of keywords for each class on Moodle before class?

Could you ...?

- Explain to students that you mark on content, but the better a student's English is, the easier it is to see whether they understand the content.
- Give the student a guide to improving their English in your first class (see hand out).
- Tell them that you expect to see an improvement in their English as they go through the programme.

Could you also ...?

- Work to ensure that all students have a time management session in their first week or two, where they map out their assessments and due dates and the estimated amount of work involved
- Commit to setting aside a small proportion of your departmental library budget each year that can be spent on English Language reference books for the library, so that students have the resources to upskill.

References

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