

Scottish International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation – SICMRI 2026

AN ANALYSIS OF FREQUENT ERRORS IN IELTS ACADEMIC WRITING TASKS 1 & 2

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Annotation: This comprehensive research report provides an exhaustive examination of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic Writing module, specifically focusing on Tasks 1 and 2. It deconstructs the structural requirements and assessment criteria of the examination while analyzing the cognitive, linguistic, and strategic difficulties faced by candidates. A significant portion of the analysis is dedicated to the specific context of Uzbekistan, offering a comparative study between global educational standards and the local pedagogical landscape. The report identifies systemic errors stemming from interlingual interference between Uzbek and English, cultural rhetorical differences, and instructional gaps. Crucially, it proposes advanced pedagogical solutions, highlighting the Pedagogical Diagnostic Method as a pivotal framework for addressing these deficiencies in high school settings. The study concludes with actionable strategies for integrating reading and writing skills to enhance proficiency and test performance, supported by rigorous analysis and referenced scholarly works.

Key words: IELTS Academic Writing, Task 1 Data Representation, Task 2 Discursive Argumentation, Pedagogical Diagnostics, Rustamov A.A., Interlingual Interference, Uzbek Educational Reform, Comparative Education, Error Analysis, Applied Linguistics, High School ELT Methodology, Formative Assessment, Cognitive Writing Processes.

1. Introduction: The Strategic Imperative of Academic Writing

In the contemporary landscape of global education and international mobility, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) stands as a monolithic gatekeeper. For millions of candidates annually, specifically those from non-Anglophone backgrounds, the IELTS Academic Writing module represents the most formidable barrier to entry for higher education and professional registration. While receptive skills such as listening and reading often see rapid improvement through passive exposure, productive skills—particularly academic writing—require a conscious, rigorous mastery of rhetorical conventions, linguistic precision, and cognitive organization.

This report aims to dissect the complexities of the IELTS writing section, moving beyond superficial test tips to explore the underlying psycholinguistic and pedagogical challenges. Of particular interest is the context of Uzbekistan, a nation currently undergoing a massive educational transformation. By contrasting the global best practices in English Language Teaching (ELT) with the evolving realities of Uzbek classrooms, we can identify unique friction

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points—where traditional grammar-translation methods collide with the communicative demands of the IELTS.

2. Deconstruction of IELTS Academic Writing Tasks

To understand where candidates fail, one must first understand the precise architecture of the test. The IELTS writing module is not merely a test of grammar; it is a test of academic literacy and convention.

2.1 Task 1: The Science of Data Representation

Task 1 of the Academic module is often deceptively simple. Candidates are presented with visual stimuli—graphs, charts, tables, diagrams, or maps—and asked to "summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant."

2.1.1 *The Nature of the Input*

The task requires the candidate to function as a data journalist. The input is strictly visual, and the output must be textual. This process involves a complex cognitive transformation known as **transmediation**. The candidate must:

1. **Decode** the visual syntax (What do the x and y axes represent? What is the unit of measurement?).
2. **Select** the salient features (What is the overall trend? What are the exceptions?).
3. **Encode** these features into linear English prose using specific academic register¹.

The visual inputs generally fall into two categories:

- **Static Data:** Tables, charts, or pie graphs showing data at a single point in time. The challenge here is comparing magnitudes—describing contrast, dominance, and proportions.
- **Dynamic Data:** Line graphs or bar charts showing change over time. The cognitive load shifts to describing trends—fluctuations, stability, peaks, and troughs.
- **Process and Maps:** Diagrams illustrating a mechanism (e.g., water cycle) or a location's development. These require a mastery of passive voice and spatial prepositions, distinct from the vocabulary of trends.

2.1.2 *Assessment Criteria: The Examiner's Lens*

Performance is graded against four equally weighted criteria. Understanding these is crucial to analyzing errors.

- **Task Achievement (TA):** This is the measure of content. Did the candidate provide an "Overview"? The overview is the single most critical component of Task 1. Without a clear summary of the main trends (e.g., "Overall, car production increased in Japan while decreasing in the US"), a candidate cannot score above Band 5.0 in TA, regardless of their grammar. TA also measures the accuracy of data; misreporting a number is a penalizable error.
- **Coherence and Cohesion (CC):** This assesses the logical flow. It is not just about using linking words like "However" or "Furthermore"; it is about **referencing**. Can the candidate

¹ Rustamov, A.A. (2025). Developing a system of exercises and tasks for written speech skills in senior students through pedagogical diagnostics. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17427317>

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use pronouns and synonyms to avoid repetition? Does the reader move smoothly from one paragraph to the next?

- **Lexical Resource (LR):** This evaluates vocabulary range and precision. High-scoring candidates use precise collocations (e.g., "a precipitous drop" vs. "a big fall").
- **Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA):** This measures the variety of structures (subordinate clauses, passive constructions) and error density.

2.2 Task 2: The Art of Discursive Argumentation

Task 2 is a discursive essay requiring a response to a point of view, argument, or problem. It carries double the weight of Task 1 and demands a minimum of 250 words.

2.2.1 The Rhetorical Challenge

Unlike Task 1, which is objective, Task 2 is subjective and argumentative. It tests higher-order thinking skills: **evaluation**, **justification**, and **synthesis**. The prompts typically follow standard academic formats:

- **Opinion Essays:** "Do you agree or disagree?"
- **Discussion Essays:** "Discuss both views and give your opinion."
- **Problem/Solution Essays:** "What are the causes and solutions?"
- **Two-Part Questions:** Direct questions requiring specific answers².

The primary difficulty here is **idea generation** and **development**. Many candidates can write grammatically correct sentences but fail to develop a coherent argument. They might list three different reasons for their opinion without explaining any of them in depth—a flaw that caps the Task Response score³.

2.2.2 Assessment Criteria

- **Task Response (TR):** Did the candidate address *all* parts of the prompt? Is their position clear throughout the essay? A common failure point is the "position" criterion; candidates often wait until the conclusion to state their opinion, whereas the Band 7+ descriptor requires a clear position throughout the response.
- **Coherence and Cohesion (CC):** In Task 2, paragraphing is paramount. Each paragraph must have a clear central topic. The error of "inadequate paragraphing" (writing one giant block of text) is an automatic limiter.
- **Lexical Resource (LR) & GRA:** Similar to Task 1, but with a requirement for more abstract and conceptual language.

3. Analysis of Frequent Errors and Candidate Difficulties

When analyzing the performance of candidates, particularly from Central Asia and Uzbekistan, distinct patterns of error emerge. These can be categorized into **Strategic**, **Cognitive**, and **Linguistic** errors⁴.

3.1 Strategic Errors: Misunderstanding the Task

² IELTS Official Partners (2024). *IELTS Academic Writing Task 1 and 2 Assessment Criteria*. Cambridge Assessment English.

³ Lee, I. (2017). *Classroom Writing Assessment and Feedback in L2 School Contexts*. Springer.

⁴ British Council & IDP (2024). *Global Test Taker Performance Statistics*.

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The "Laundry List" Syndrome (Task 1):

One of the most pervasive errors in Task 1 is the mechanical listing of data. Candidates, fearing they will miss something important, attempt to describe every single bar on the chart or every number in the table.

- *The Result:* The writing lacks a "Main Feature" summary. The narrative becomes a boring recitation of figures ("In 1990 it was 10, in 1991 it was 12...").
- *The Penalty:* This directly violates the instruction to "summarize," capping the Task Achievement score at Band 5. The examiner is looking for synthesis, not enumeration.

The "Template Trap" (Task 2):

In an effort to "hack" the exam, many students memorize high-level templates. They begin essays with flowery, archaic phrases like "Since the dawn of civilization, mankind has debated..." or "It is undeniable that...".

- *The Error:* These phrases are often stylistically inappropriate (clichéd) or used incorrectly. Furthermore, examiners are trained to ignore memorized chunks, meaning the word count drops, and the remaining original writing often reveals a significantly lower level of proficiency.
- *The Human Element:* A genuinely humanized essay uses a natural academic voice ("It is often argued that..."), whereas the template approach sounds robotic and disjointed⁵.

3.2 Cognitive Errors: Failures in Logic and Organization

Circular Reasoning:

In Task 2, candidates often struggle to extend their ideas. They confuse explanation with repetition.

- *Example:* "Pollution is bad because it is harmful." (This is circular).
- *Correction:* "Pollution is detrimental because it introduces toxins into the respiratory systems of urban residents, leading to chronic health issues." (This is developed). Candidates failing to make this cognitive leap from assertion to explanation frequently plateau at Band 6.0 for Task Response.

The Missing Overview:

In Task 1, the absence of an overview is fatal to a high score. Many candidates bury the overview in the conclusion or omit it entirely. Cognitively, this suggests a failure to process the "big picture" of the data.

3.3 Linguistic Errors: The Grammar of Inaccuracy

Syntactic Complexity vs. Accuracy:

A common misconception is that "long sentences equal high scores." Candidates attempt to write labyrinthine sentences with multiple relative clauses, often losing control of the grammar.

⁵ Ferris, D.R. (2012). *Written Corrective Feedback in Second Language Acquisition and Writing*. Routledge.

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- *The Analysis:* A sentence like, "The graph which shows the population that increased rapidly while the other one decreasing," is a fragmented disaster.
- *The Fix:* Candidates must learn that complex grammar includes simple compound sentences, conditionals, and passive structures used *accurately*.

Lexical Precision: "Thesaurus syndrome" is rampant. Candidates replace simple, correct words with complex, incorrect synonyms.

- *Example:* Using "commence" instead of "start" in an informal context, or "kids" instead of "children" in a formal one.
- *Collocation Errors:* Writing "do a mistake" instead of "make a mistake," or "big popularity" instead of "widespread popularity."⁶

4. The Uzbek Context: A Comparative Pedagogical Analysis

To understand the roots of these errors for Uzbek students, we must look beyond the test itself to the educational environment. Uzbekistan is currently navigating a significant transition from a Soviet-legacy educational model to a modern, competency-based system.

4.1 Linguistic Interference: Uzbek vs. English

The native language (L1) of the learner plays a massive role in the types of errors produced. Uzbek is an **agglutinative**, Turkic language with a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) typical word order. English is an **analytic** language with Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order.

Table 1: Comparative Linguistic Features and Induced Errors

Feature	English (Target Language)	Uzbek (Native Language)	Resulting Error in IELTS Writing
Word Order	Strict SVO (Subject-Verb-Object). "I read the book."	Flexible SOV. "Men kitobni o'qidim" (I the book read).	Syntax Errors: Students often place the verb at the end of the sentence or bury the object, disrupting the flow of English syntax.
Articles	Definite (the) and Indefinite (a/an) are crucial for meaning.	No articles. Specificity is indicated by case endings or context.	Article Omission: "I saw dog" instead of "I saw a dog." This is the most persistent error for Uzbek learners.
Verbs	Tense is marked by auxiliary verbs (have/had/will).	Tense is marked by suffixes added to the verb stem.	Tense Confusion: Difficulty with Perfect tenses (Present Perfect vs. Past Simple), often using Past Simple for

⁶ Krashen, S.D. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Longman.

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			recent relevance.
Prepositions	Highly idiomatic and arbitrary (in, on, at).	Case endings (suffixes like -da, -ga, -dan) handle location/direction.	Preposition Misuse: "I am <i>in</i> the bus" (instead of on) or "I go <i>to</i> home" (instead of go home).

4.2 Cultural Rhetoric and Academic Style

Beyond grammar, culture shapes *how* we argue.

- **English Rhetoric:** Linear, direct, and inductive. The writer is responsible for clarity. "State your point, prove it, move on."
- **Uzbek Rhetoric:** Often more circular, deductive, and high-context. It values modesty and indirectness. A direct, forceful opinion can be seen as impolite or aggressive.
- *Impact on Task 2:* Uzbek students often hedge their opinions excessively ("It is possible that maybe..."). They may delay the main point until the very end, which confuses the English examiner who expects the "Thesis Statement" upfront.
- *Impact on Task 1:* There is a tendency to "tell a story" about the data rather than scientifically report it, leading to issues with tone.

4.3 Educational Systems: Global vs. Uzbek Approaches

The Global Standard (Communicative Language Teaching - CLT):

In major English-speaking markets (UK, Australia, Canada), writing is taught as a process.

- Students draft, peer-review, edit, and redraft.
- Errors are viewed as a natural part of learning.
- Focus is on *communication*—getting the message across.

The Traditional Uzbek Context: Despite reforms, many classrooms still rely on Grammar-Translation methods.

- **Teacher-Centered:** The teacher is the sole authority.
- **Product-Oriented:** Emphasis is on the final exam result, not the drafting process.
- **Accuracy over Fluency:** Students are often terrified of making mistakes because traditional grading punishes every error equally. This leads to **risk-avoidance** strategies, where students write extremely simple sentences to stay safe, thereby failing to meet the "Grammatical Range" criteria for Band 7.

Recent Reforms: It is important to acknowledge the rapid changes in Uzbekistan. The government's "English Speaking Nation" project and the adoption of CEFR standards are shifting the landscape. However, the legacy of rote learning persists, particularly in rural areas, creating a duality where students may know complex grammar rules theoretically but cannot apply them in spontaneous writing.

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5. Pedagogical Solutions: Addressing these deep-seated issues requires more than just more practice tests. It requires a fundamental shift in how writing is taught and assessed. In this context, the work of Alisher A. Rustamov at the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages offers a critical, locally adapted solution: Pedagogical Diagnostics⁷.

5.1 Defining Pedagogical Diagnostics

Pedagogical diagnostics differ from standard testing. While a standard test asks, "What score does this student deserve?", a diagnostic assessment asks, "Why is this student making this specific error, and what does it reveal about their interlanguage?"

The linguists argue that effective teaching must be preceded by precise diagnosis. In his framework, the teacher acts as a clinician. The method is particularly effective for high school students preparing for IELTS because it moves the focus from "passing the test" to "curing the linguistic deficit."

5.2 The Methodology in Practice

Pedagogical diagnostic approach can be broken down into a cyclical process tailored for the Uzbek classroom:

Phase 1: The Diagnostic Probe

Instead of a full IELTS mock test, students perform targeted micro-tasks.

- *Task:* "Write three sentences describing the trend in this line graph."
- *Objective:* To isolate specific skills (e.g., vocabulary of change) without the cognitive load of a full essay.

Phase 2: Error Classification (Not Just Correction)

The teacher analyzes the output, categorizing errors into:

- **Lapses:** Mistakes the student can self-correct (due to carelessness).
- **Systemic Errors:** Mistakes reflecting a gap in knowledge (e.g., consistent failure to use the passive voice for process diagrams).
- **Pre-systemic Errors:** Attempts to use complex language that the student hasn't mastered yet (a sign of learning).

Phase 3: The "Pedagogical Prescription"

Based on the diagnosis, the teacher intervenes.

- If the class shows **L1 Interference** (e.g., wrong word order), the teacher uses contrastive analysis, showing the Uzbek sentence side-by-side with the English one to highlight the structural difference.
- If the issue is **Strategic** (e.g., no overview), the intervention is structural, not grammatical.

⁷ Rustamov, A.A. (2025). *Utilizing Pedagogical Diagnostics in Developing Written Speech Skills in a Foreign Language for High School Students in Uzbekistan*. Journal of Foreign Linguistics and Linguodidactics.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/398049265_Utilizing_Pedagogical_Diagnostics_in_Developing_Written_Speech_Skills_in_a_Foreign_Language_for_High_School_Students_in_Uzbekistan

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Phase 4: Formative Feedback Loops

Rustamov emphasizes that feedback must be actionable. Instead of writing "Grammar - 5/10", the teacher writes, "Check your subject-verb agreement in paragraph 2." This forces the student to engage with their own work, fostering the autonomy that is often missing in traditional Uzbek education⁸.

5.3 Comparative Advantage of the Method

Table 2: Traditional Instruction vs. Pedagogical Diagnostic Method

Aspect	Traditional Approach	Pedagogical Diagnostic Method
Timing	Post-test (Summative). "You failed."	Pre- and Mid-process (Formative). "Here is how to fix it."
Focus	The Grade (Band Score).	The Learning Gap (The "Why").
Student Role	Passive recipient of correction.	Active investigator of own errors.
Outcome	Students repeat errors (Fossilization).	Students internalize rules (Acquisition).

Citing the works of different linguists, this method aligns with global best practices in assessment for learning but is specifically calibrated for the educational culture of Uzbekistan, respecting the need for structure while encouraging communicative freedom.

6. Integrated Approaches: Teaching Reading and Writing Skills

One of the most effective ways to improve writing is to stop teaching it in isolation. Writing and reading are two sides of the same coin. High school students in Uzbekistan often treat reading passages as translation exercises rather than models of writing.

6.1 The Reading-to-Write Strategy

To achieve high scores, students must be exposed to the "code" of academic English.

- **Genre Analysis:** Teachers should use reading texts (even IELTS Reading passages) as models⁹.
- *Activity:* "Highlight the topic sentence in every paragraph."
- *Activity:* "Circle every cohesive device (However, Therefore, As a result)."

⁸ Rustamov, A.A. (2025). *Utilizing Pedagogical Diagnostics in Developing Written Speech Skills in a Foreign Language for High School Students in Uzbekistan*. Journal of Foreign Linguistics and Linguodidactics.

⁹ Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press. (This seminal work provides the foundation for genre-based pedagogy and understanding the social context of L2 writing).

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- **Insight:** By deconstructing a professional text, students see the "skeleton" of academic writing. They learn that Coherence and Cohesion are not abstract concepts but visible mechanical linkages.

6.2 The SQ3R + W Method

Adapting the classic **SQ3R** reading method (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) for writing students:

- **Survey:** Look at the text structure.
- **Question:** What is the author's stance?
- **Read:** Deep comprehension.
- **Write (The Addition):** Summarize the text.
- *Relevance to Task 1:* Summarizing a text requires the same "selection and reporting" skills as summarizing a graph. It builds the cognitive muscle of synthesis.

6.3 Digital Literacy and Automated Feedback

In the modern classroom, technology can act as a tireless teaching assistant. Tools like Grammarly or ChatGPT (used ethically) can provide immediate feedback on surface-level errors (spelling, basic grammar). This allows the human teacher to focus on the deeper issues: logic, argumentation, and voice.

- *Recommendation:* Students should use these tools to "clean" their drafts before submission. The teacher then assesses the *content* and *structure*, which AI still struggles to critique with human nuance.

7. Strategic Recommendations for High Scores

For candidates and educators aiming for Band 7.0 and above, attention must shift to the subtleties of the language.

7.1 What Should Be Paid Best Attention To?

1. The Overview (Task 1):

- This is non-negotiable. Teachers must drill students to identify the "Big Trend" immediately. A clear, separate paragraph starting with "Overall..." is the safest and most effective strategy.

2. Paragraphing (Task 2):

- The visual layout matters. A Band 7 essay usually has 4 paragraphs: Introduction, Body 1 (Topic A), Body 2 (Topic B), Conclusion. The break between paragraphs signals a shift in thought, essential for the Coherence score.

3. Collocation over Complexity:

- Candidates must unlearn the habit of using "big words" incorrectly. Examiners prefer "rapid growth" (simple but correct collocation) over "precipitous amelioration" (complex but wrong).

4. Voice and Stance:

- Humanizing the essay means having an opinion. Candidates should be taught that it is okay to take a side. "I believe that..." is not forbidden; in an opinion essay, it is required.

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8. Conclusion

The journey to mastering IELTS Academic Writing is arduous, particularly for students navigating the linguistic chasm between Uzbek and English. The frequent errors observed—ranging from the strategic omission of overviews to the linguistic interference of L1 syntax—are symptoms of deeper pedagogical and cognitive gaps.

However, the educational landscape is not static. By moving away from the punitive, product-oriented methods of the past and embracing **Pedagogical Diagnostics** as championed by Alisher Rustamov, educators can transform errors into learning opportunities. This method, when combined with an integrated skills approach that marries reading and writing, offers a robust framework for success.

Ultimately, the goal of IELTS preparation should not merely be a certificate. It should be the development of a critical, articulate, and globally competent voice. For the students of Uzbekistan, this competency is the key to unlocking the doors of international opportunity.

Citations and References

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