



Fixing Common Tense Errors in IELTS Essays

What's This About?

Tense errors are one of the most common grammar issues for IELTS candidates. These mistakes usually don't stop communication—but they lower your grammar score because they make writing feel inconsistent, awkward, or unclear. Even strong writers can lose marks if they mix past and present, use the wrong perfect tense, or switch tenses mid-paragraph.

This pack focuses on fixing those errors. You'll learn how to recognise tense shifts, understand why certain tenses are preferred in IELTS Writing, and build confidence using past, present, and future forms correctly. We'll also cover the biggest tense mistakes students make—like 'I am agree' or 'It was increasing now'—and how to avoid them.

IELTS Scoring Impact

The public IELTS band descriptors clearly mention 'tense control' under the Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA) band. If your essay contains frequent tense shifts or incorrect combinations like 'I have seen it last year', you're unlikely to get beyond Band 6.

Tense errors make writing feel messy—even when the ideas are strong. Band 7 and above requires consistent, logical use of tense across the whole essay. This doesn't mean using only one tense—but knowing when and how to switch between them for effect or logic.

Common Mistakes

Tense mistakes in IELTS essays usually come from trying to translate directly from a native language or misunderstanding how English tenses work. Here are the most common ones:

- Using present continuous when present simple is needed: 'It is increase now.'
- Using past simple with time expressions that require present perfect: 'I have seen it last year.'

- Applying present tense to future intentions: 'Next year I study abroad.'
- Confusing stative verbs with present continuous: 'I am agree.'

These issues are especially damaging in IELTS because they appear in topic sentences, conclusions, and main ideas. Repeated errors show a lack of grammatical control, even when the meaning is clear.

Rewrite Rules

To improve tense accuracy, apply these five rules:

1. Use present simple for general facts or opinions: 'People need jobs.'
2. Use past simple for completed actions: 'The policy changed in 2021.'
3. Use present perfect for recent or time-unspecified experiences: 'I have worked in tourism.'
4. Don't mix time markers and tenses: not 'I have seen it last week' — say 'I saw it last week.'
5. Avoid continuous forms with stative verbs: not 'I am understand', but 'I understand.'

Keep your tenses logical across each paragraph. If you begin with a past situation, don't shift back and forth. Good writing follows a timeline.

Comparison Examples

Band 5:

Many students are studying abroad. They go last year. I am agree it is good. It was increasing now.

Band 7:

Many students choose to study abroad. Last year, thousands of students moved to English-speaking countries. I agree that this trend offers great opportunities, and the number of international learners continues to grow.

In the Band 7 version, each verb matches the logical timeframe. Present simple is used for trends, past simple for past events, and continuous tense only where needed.

Rewrite Practice

Correct the tense issues in this paragraph. Watch out for mixed tenses, incorrect forms, or logic errors:

"People was feeling more pressure now. In the past, they are relaxed. It is change fast. I have seen this two years ago."

Try to keep the timeline clear and consistent.

Mini Quiz: Which Sentence Uses Tense Correctly?

Choose the sentence that uses tense correctly:

- A. I have visited Paris last summer.
- B. People are needing more time to relax.
- C. The number of tourists has increased in recent years.

Strategy Add-ons

- Highlight time phrases in your writing (e.g., 'last year', 'now', 'in the future') and check if the verb tense matches.
- Keep a log of your most common tense errors and rewrite them using correct structures.
- Practice switching tense on purpose: write the same sentence in past, present, and future.
- In Task 1 (Academic), use past for historical data, present perfect for recent trends, and present simple for facts.

Mastering tense use improves both accuracy and clarity. IELTS examiners will notice when your writing follows a clear, logical timeline—and reward you for it.

Paragraph Upgrade Exercise

Band 5:

People are wanting better jobs. They go abroad last year. It is helping them now. They was study hard.

Band 7:

Many people want better employment opportunities. Last year, a large number of workers moved abroad to pursue higher salaries. This decision is helping them build stronger careers, and many have studied intensely to meet international standards.

Get in Touch

Tense control is one of the key things that separates Band 6 writing from Band 7. If your grammar feels strange or inconsistent, we can help you clean it up fast. Get clear on when to use past, present, or perfect — and show the examiner you have full control of your sentence structure.

👉 Book a 30-minute session at: <https://ieltsjack.com>