



What Are Complex Sentences in IELTS Writing?

What's This About?

This grammar pack focuses on one of the most misunderstood requirements in IELTS Writing: complex sentences. Many students either avoid them completely or try to write overly complicated structures that reduce clarity. In the IELTS Writing band descriptors, the phrase 'uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms' appears in Band 6 and above for Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA). This means that if you don't attempt complex structures at all, you're unlikely to score beyond Band 5. This pack explains what complex sentences are (and what they are not), why they matter, and how you can use them effectively without sacrificing clarity or control.

You'll explore the difference between real complexity and confusing grammar, why even imperfect complex structures are rewarded, and how to avoid common traps. By the end of this pack, you'll be able to identify, construct, and control a range of complex sentence types that will boost your grammar score while keeping your message clear. We'll also look at safe templates and upgrades you can use across Task 2 topics to show variety without introducing errors.

IELTS Scoring Impact

Complex sentences are a core requirement of Band 6 and above in the IELTS Writing band descriptors. To achieve Band 6 for Grammatical Range and Accuracy, you must 'use a mix of simple and complex sentence forms.' For Band 7, the criteria require you to 'use a variety of complex structures.' This means that writing entirely in simple sentences—even if they are correct—limits your score to a Band 5 for this criterion. IELTS is not testing for perfection; it rewards range, variety, and effort. In fact, candidates who attempt complex sentences and make occasional errors will often score higher than those who write only safe, simple ones.

Examiners are looking for signs that you can connect ideas using subordination, relative clauses, conditionals, or participle phrases. These structures show that you can manage grammar flexibly and use it to express relationships between ideas. If you never attempt a complex sentence, it suggests a limited range. Even a few well-placed complex sentences can significantly improve your score, especially when they are used appropriately to show cause, contrast, or concession.

Common Mistakes

One of the biggest misconceptions students have about complex sentences is thinking they must be long or contain difficult vocabulary. In reality, a complex sentence is defined by its structure—not its length or word difficulty. Many students write run-on sentences or simply chain together clauses with 'and' or 'but', believing this adds complexity. Unfortunately, this often leads to confusion and poor grammar, not a higher score. True complexity involves clear use of subordination: showing cause, result, contrast, or condition using proper grammar.

Another common mistake is repeating the same complex structure over and over—such as using 'because' in every paragraph. While these attempts are better than avoiding complexity, they still limit your score under GRA. Students should also avoid using overly formal or academic phrases they don't fully understand, which can introduce errors. The goal is clarity and range: using different types of complex sentences correctly and naturally. Even short complex sentences are more valuable than forced or artificial long ones.

Rewrite Rules

Here are five essential rules to help you use complex sentences safely and effectively in IELTS Writing:

1. Identify relationships: Use grammar to show contrast, cause, result, condition, and purpose.
2. Use subordinators: Words like 'although', 'because', 'even though', 'while', and 'if' signal complexity.
3. Add relative clauses: Use 'who', 'which', or 'that' to extend information about nouns.
4. Keep it clean: Start with simple structures (e.g., 'Although it was raining, I went outside.') and build from there.
5. Avoid stacking: Don't cram multiple clauses into one sentence unless you're confident with punctuation and clarity.

By following these rules, you'll demonstrate control, variety, and flexibility—all features of high-band writing. Practice constructing these sentences deliberately, and remember: a safe complex sentence is always better than avoiding them altogether.

Comparison Examples

Let's compare a Band 5 paragraph that avoids complexity with a Band 7 rewrite that uses safe complex structures:

Band 5: 'Many people go to the city. They want to find jobs. They live in apartments. The cost is high. They do not save money.'

Band 7: Many people choose to move to the city because they believe it offers better job prospects and higher salaries. While this may be true in some cases, the cost of living in urban areas is often much higher than expected. Rent, transportation, and daily expenses quickly add up, making it difficult for new arrivals to save money or build financial stability. Although they might earn more than they did in rural areas, much of that income is spent on basic necessities. As a result, many people continue to feel financial pressure despite their efforts, and some even question whether the move was worth it in the long term.

The Band 7 version shows clear relationships using subordinators like 'because', 'although', and 'so'. These structures improve flow, show grammar control, and reflect real IELTS sentence complexity. You don't need to use obscure grammar—just connect ideas logically using subordinate clauses or relative structures.

Rewrite Practice

Take the following simple paragraph and rewrite it using at least three different types of complex structures:

"People use cars. They want to travel. Cities are busy. There is traffic. People are late."

Try to use subordinators, relative clauses, and contrast or cause-and-effect grammar to rewrite this in a more natural, connected way.

Example rewrite:

"People often use cars because they want to travel comfortably. However, since cities are usually busy, traffic becomes a major issue. As a result, many people arrive late to work or appointments."

Mini Quiz: Identify the Complex Sentence

Which of the following sentences is a complex sentence?

- A. 'Many people enjoy music and listen to it every day.'
- B. 'Although many people enjoy music, some prefer silence when working.'
- C. 'People enjoy music. They listen to it while they work.'

Strategy Add-ons

- **Build from simple to complex:** Write a basic idea first, then add a clause to develop it.
- **Use a sentence bank:** Memorise 3–4 safe complex structures and adapt them across topics.
Example: 'Although some people believe X, others argue Y.'
- **Control before variety:** Don't overcomplicate. Show mastery of 3–4 complex forms and use them with confidence rather than forcing complexity where it doesn't fit.

One of the best strategies is to upgrade your Task 2 body topic sentences. Begin with a subordinating phrase or a relative clause in every paragraph start. This quickly shows the examiner that you understand how to vary sentence structure and gives your argument an academic tone right from the start.

Paragraph Upgrade Exercise

Band 5 Paragraph:

Some people eat fast food every day. They think it saves time. It is cheap. It is not healthy. They

eat it anyway.

Band 7 Rewrite:

Although fast food is not healthy, some people eat it every day because they believe it saves time and money. Despite being aware of the risks, they continue the habit due to its convenience and low cost.

Get in Touch

If you're avoiding complex sentences because you're afraid of making mistakes, you're not alone. But IELTS rewards the attempt—variety and risk-taking in grammar are necessary for a high score. Let us help you build safe, flexible structures that work across multiple essay types.

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

Comparison Examples

Let's compare a Band 5 paragraph that avoids complexity with a Band 7 rewrite that uses safe, controlled complex structures.

Band 5:

Many people go to the city. They want to find jobs. They live in apartments. The cost is high. They do not save money.

Band 7:

Many people move to urban areas because they are looking for better job opportunities and a more stable income. Although they often end up living in small apartments, the high cost of living makes it difficult for them to save money or improve their long-term financial situation. As a result, even though they may earn more than they did in rural areas, much of their income is spent on rent, transport, and basic necessities. This creates a cycle where people work hard but continue to face financial pressure due to the overall expense of city life.

The Band 7 version demonstrates clear relationships between ideas using subordinators like because, although, even though, and as a result. These structures improve flow, signal logic, and show flexible grammar control. This is exactly the kind of complexity IELTS examiners are looking for — not forced or advanced grammar, but confident use of natural sentence variety. You don't need to use academic phrasing or difficult vocabulary. Simply connect your ideas clearly using subordinate clauses or relative structures, and your grammar score will improve.

✓ **Correct Answer: B** — This sentence includes a dependent clause introduced by 'although', showing proper complexity.