



## **KEP 42: The Examiner's Eye – Seeing IELTS the Way Examiners Do**

Hello and welcome to Kev's English Podcast, real English every week, with your host Kev Dean. Hello, hello, hello, it's Kev here. Again, another episode 42, I think, Kev's English Podcast, the English native, etc., the usual caper.

Now, this is based off an article that I wrote for LinkedIn last week. [Link below](#) if you want to subscribe to my newsletter. And I've been writing a few pedagogical articles over this last week or two, and I wrote a very interesting one about OET called The Examiner's Ear, where I was explaining how, in order to get high scores for OET, which is the Occupational English Tests for doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc., first you need to understand the criteria from the examiner's perspective.

And that's one of the things that high-scoring candidates do for both writing and speaking. And I thought, well, there's a logical extension to this for IELTS. And this is something I try to encourage in my students, understanding not the examiner's ear, but the examiner's eyes.

Understanding what the criteria actually mean. Now, I get lots of students on italki quite a lot from China, and they ask about IELTS, writing and speaking. And usually, if they give themselves enough time, they can get the scores that they need.

That's a fact. So what they think they know. So we're talking and I say, right, you know, do you know the criteria? And they say, oh, yeah, yeah, task, response, coherence, cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range, and accuracy.

They've seen it, they've read it, or they've seen the table. Maybe they haven't actually read the table. I think that's more the case.

So they think that they know what the criteria are. They know what these four phrases are, task, response, coherence, cohesion, lexis, grammar, etc. But they don't know what they mean in practise.

They have no idea. And this is why I get low scores, I get 5.5, I get 6 for the writing section. I'm not

so fluent speaking, but that's a separate issue.

So they know what they think the criteria are, right? What the criteria are called, we should say. But they don't know what they mean in practise. They think task, response means write 250 words.

They think coherence means use linking words like firstly, in conclusion. They think lexical resource means memorise big words. And that's why so many essays read formulaic, mechanical, safe.

They follow the labels, but we don't understand how an examiner actually reads an essay, what the criteria are. So that's what I want to talk about. So to write like about seven or eight, you need to stop looking at the criteria.

And, you know, look at it from the examiner's perspective, you as the examiner. This is what I do for OET. And I do it for IELTS as well, when we have time, because often people come and we don't give ourselves sufficient preparation time, and they just want me to give them some general advice.

But I call this approach the examiner's eye. It's an extension of the examiner's ear for OET speaking. And just like in OET, the idea is simple to perform like a high band candidate, you need to experience the test the way the examiner does.

Understand the criteria, understand what the examiner is looking for, not just simply what the criteria are called. So let's start. So I did the pilot study, research a couple of months back for my Chinese IELTS candidates.

I noticed the same issues, time, and again, excessive template use, misinterpret the prompts, go off topic, don't understand what the question is. It's binary, it's either good or bad, cooperation is better, competition is better, no context, examples were trivial and weak. I think I mentioned this in a previous episode, let me check, was it a previous episode? Why frameworks beat templates? Yeah, I mentioned something in episode 37, I was talking about this for IELTS students, and the hypothesis there was a lack of critical thinking skills.

So anyway, that's episode 37. So this is kind of an extension of that. So cohesion was formulaic, they've got, you know, on one hand, on the other hand, firstly, secondly, conclusions often just repeated the introductions.

So these are language issues. As I said, in that episode, it's about an education system that rewards memorisation and safe answers, not critical engagement. So again, which I spoke about, about critical thinking skills, very important and why most exams these days are incorporating some element of critical thinking to get through the templates.

Yeah. So here's the insight to write like about seven or eight candidates, you need to see your essay through the examiner's eyes. So if you think about it, examiners read hundreds of essays, they're not impressed by template tripe.

They're looking for clarity, balance, relevance. They want to see that you've unpacked the question, consider multiple perspectives, supported your ideas with concrete examples. But most students never practise this.

They never practise reading like an examiner. Now, this is where my examiner's eye method, it comes in. It's built on a framework called learning by design.

I'm currently reading a very interesting book called Generative AI Technologies in Language Education. I think it was. Yeah, I know what's a full title.

Generative AI Technologies, Multi Literacies and Language Education. Very interesting. I've been learning quite a lot from reading that.

So back to the plot. The learning by design argument is that deep learning happens when we move through four processes, experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying. So for IELTS writing, first experiencing.

So instead of just writing essays, they read sample essays, a band five, a band six, a band seven and eight and a nine. And they read them as examiners. So we go into the criteria.

What does it mean? So they can see real examples between five, six, seven, eight, nine. What are the differences? Next, we translate the criteria into plain English. So task response becomes, did you fully answer the question with clear ideas and examples? Coherence becomes, is there a natural flow to the writing or does it feel mechanical? Then analysing, students critique the essays.

They look at it from the examiner's side. They say, oh, that example doesn't work. Reasoning is only one sided.

It doesn't do this. It doesn't do that. So by exposing them to different band examples, they can get a better idea of what these four phrases, task, response, cohesion, blah, blah, blah, what they actually mean.

Finally, applying, they rewrite their own essays with examiner awareness, predicting how each paragraph would be scored. Now, this cycle turns writing to a reflective practise. Now, this is where the important part is, artificial intelligence, which is a misnomer because although it's artificial, it's certainly not intelligent.

The problem is most students don't know what the criteria mean, as I've said. So we can use AI to make the invisible apparent or visible. So for example, as teachers, we can get AI to generate different versions of the same essay.

I can tell it, write this essay at band five, write it at band six, write it at band seven, write it at band eight, write it at band nine. Students can do that for themselves. In the conceptualising stage, AI can translate the criteria.

Instead of jargon, they get concrete questions. Did I answer all parts of the prompt? Did I give specific examples? Is my position clear in this essay? In the analysis stage, AI can highlight weaknesses. It can point out when cohesion is mechanical, vague example.

It can even suggest counter arguments. And in the application stage, they rewrite their essays and ask AI to mark them. They compare this with their own self-assessment, closing the reflective loop or gap.

So in this way, right, AI becomes a rehearsal partner. It's a constructivist application, a pedagogy of constructivism. They're co-constructing with AI some knowledge.

They're constructing, they're making it themselves. So in this way, AI is not a replacement. You're not simply asking them, write me an essay, and that's what you submit, because obviously you can't

do that in the actual examination.

But by using AI reflectively, it becomes a rehearsal partner. You can see you're writing through the examiner's eyes. Now, why does this matter? Because it's an identity shift.

They're no longer passive, trying to guess what the examiner wants. They've got no idea. They're just writing and hoping for the best.

Maybe they've got some templates that they're using. You know, that's what lots of them do. So they become apprentice examiners.

They're making a judgement, and in doing so, they're internalising what the standards are. Now, for Chinese learners in particular, this is powerful. Many come from systems where debate is limited, risk-taking is discouraged, and safe formulaic answers are rewarded.

The examiner's eye gives them a rehearsal space to practise evaluative thinking. They can explore multiple perspectives without fear of being wrong. It reframes writing as dialogue, not as monologue, and that shift is transformative.

So a challenge to you, my dear listeners and readers on LinkedIn. Next time you write an essay, don't just write it. Be the examiner.

Read your work aloud and say, if I were marking this, what band would I give it and why? Use AI. Write your essay first. Copy it into DeepSeq or Chat or Copilot.

I use Chat GPT-5 Pro. I've got Copilot. I use Grok.

I use DeepSeq as well for comparison purposes. You always use two. Don't just use one.

Always use two. So get it to show you a band five version of your essay, then a six, then a seven, then an eight. Get it to show you the differences.

Get it to compare it to the criteria so you can see. So you develop the skills, the critical thinking, you know, that exams like Coyotes are designed to reward. Yeah.

I mean, I've started incorporating this into my classes for OET. I tell them, you know, what you need to do is write your letter first and then leave it, come back to it. Imagine that you're the examiner.

Read it with fresh examiner's eyes, using AI to assist you. Because now, don't be thinking that it's somehow cheating because don't forget in the actual test, you won't have it. You won't have access to artificial intelligence.

You'll have to sit and write by hand or type your essay. So it's not plagiarising. It's cheating because you're not using it in the actual test.

You're using it to help you as a tool, a partner, to show you. So you can be the examiner. So you can have the examiner's eye.

OK. Hope that gives you some ideas. Time for me to get off.

Students are coming. So I'll see you. Well, I'll see.

I keep saying that. I won't see any of you. Well, except my own students, of course.

Anyway, if you've got any questions, any comments, you can... wherever you're listening, on italki or Spotify or on [theenglishnative.com](http://theenglishnative.com), you can drop me a comment or if you're on LinkedIn, add me, message me there. Whatever you feel like doing. OK.

And I'll see you then. So, the examiner's eye. You be the examiner.

I think you'll find your writing will be all the better. If you do so.