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## Communicative Strategies to Respond to IELTS Essay Writing Questions: The Case in Band 7

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**Abstract** This study intends to analyze communicative strategies to respond to IELTS essay writing questions. It used a genre-based approach for the analysis, using 20 IELTS essay writing samples and receiving band seven. The results revealed that IELTS test takers in this study employed two communicative strategies to respond to questions: presenting introductory responses and responding to questions either explicitly or implicitly. However, while they used simple sentences more than the other sentence types in presenting introductory responses, they used more complex sentences to respond to the questions. Then, they tend to write these two communicative strategies in simple present tense forms. The implications of these findings are discussed in the discussion section.

**Keywords:** Communicative Strategies; Essay Questions; IELTS Essay Writings Band 7; Responses.

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**Abstrak** Penelitian ini menganalisis *communicative strategies* untuk merespon pertanyaan penulisan esai di IELTS. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan berbasis *genre*, menggunakan 20 contoh penulisan esai IELTS dengan band tujuh. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa peserta tes IELTS dalam penelitian ini menggunakan dua *communicative strategies* untuk menanggapi pertanyaan: menyajikan tanggapan pendahuluan dan menanggapi pertanyaan baik secara eksplisit maupun implisit. Namun, mereka lebih menggunakan kalimat yang lebih sederhana sebagai pendahuluan. Namun, mereka menggunakan kalimat yang lebih kompleks ketika menanggapi pertanyaan. Kemudian, mereka cenderung menulis kedua *communicative strategies* ini dalam bentuk simple present tense. Implikasi dari temuan ini dibahas di bagian pembahasan.

**Kata Kunci:** *Communicative Strategies*; Pertanyaan Esai; Penulisan Esai IELTS Band 7; Respons.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Studies on communicative strategies in academic texts have received huge numbers of scholarly attention. For example, communicative strategies have been analyzed to identify the ways authors communicate their innovation in research articles (Abdi & Sadeghi, 2018; Deng et al., 2024; Warsidi, 2023a; Zibalas & Šinkūnienė, 2019), justify research instruments (Lim, 2014), innovate current research (Warsidi & Adnan, 2024), communicate abstract (Warsidi, 2021), communicate discussion section (Peacock, 2002), etc. Besides, communicative strategies also have been investigated in sales copies (Warsidi, 2024a; Zhang et al., 2022), application letters (Warsidi, 2022), International English Language Testing System (IELTS) speaking (Warsidi, Damayanti, et al., 2024), etc. All these studies imply that communicative strategies are an important study in linguistics. The reason is that these studies mainly analyze how successful authors or speakers achieve their purposes in communicating ideas. To do so, they employ communicative strategies to reach their communicative goals.

However, communicative strategies in IELTS studies and practices seem hard to find in the literature. For example, although Warsidi, Damayanti, et al. (2024) analyzed communicative strategies in IELTS, the purpose was to find out the rhetorical model in the speaking part, and essay writing is still undeveloped and needs more attention. Besides, IELTS essay writings have received more scholarly attention, such as conducting experiments through corrective feedback to develop students' essay writing (Jafary et al., 2023), through students-teachers engagements (Pearson, 2022), and through building knowledge using genre-based approaches (Damayanti et al., 2023). Besides, IELTS test takers' problems in essay writing (Ariani & Arham, 2020) and argumentative assessments in IELTS essays (Ahmad, 2019) have been analyzed. However, communicative strategies for reaching high scores in IELTS essay writing are still hardly found.

During my review, the only study of communicative strategies in IELTS essay writings was conducted by Ananda et al. (2018). This study analyzed 60 IELTS essay writings band 8-9, and the results revealed that test takers employed three communicative strategies: leading in the presentation topics, presenting thesis statements, and deducting the essays. These three communicative strategies are presented using claims, data, and warrants with either simple or strong structures. This study may contribute to the study of IELTS essay writing in the literature and may help

future IELTS test takers to guide how to rhetorically structure the contents when answering questions in IELTS essay writing tests. However, although this study has developed and advanced literature, the ways to lead in responding to questions in IELTS essay writings have not been clearly analyzed.

By comprehending these knowledge gaps in the literature, this study intends to analyze communicative strategies to respond to questions in IELTS writing because understanding the ways of responding to questions may provide comprehension to future IELTS test takers to start writing their essays. To execute this intention, this study formulates three research questions as guides to focus the analysis. The three research questions are: 1) What types of responses do IELTS test takers employ in answering their essay writing questions, and to what extent are they employed in responding to essay writing questions? 2) What syntactic sentences do they employ to respond to essay writing questions? 3) What tenses do they use for essay-writing questions? Answering the three questions above may provide contribution to knowledge and practices within IELTS essay writings. In term of knowledge, this study may add some knowledge in the literature regarding ways to respond to essay writing questions within IELTS. In term of practices, the results of this study may create awareness to those intending to take IELTS tests and may be used to create teaching materials for IELTS writing classes.

## **METHOD**

This study used a genre-based approach for analyzing data as likely in some earlier studies in different contexts (Warsidi, 2024a, 2024b; Warsidi & Adnan, 2024; Warsidi et al., 2023; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024) by following genre-approach studies as suggested in Swales (1990, 2004) because this approach may potentially find real communicative events to respond IELTS essay writing questions. Then, it also employed a method for reporting the analysis results because employing both quantitative and qualitative methods may support one another, and thus, the results may become more convincing than one method alone.

Data sets in the present study are 20 IELTS essay writings band 7. The reason for choosing them is based on band 7 because this band score is considered acceptable for applying to universities in English-speaking countries, like Australia, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), etc. Thus, analyzing essay writings that received this band is considered good essay writing.

The 20 IELTS essay writings were collected by searching them on the internet, and as a result, a website that showed collective essay band 7 was identified in [this link](#). This link provides hundreds of IELTS essay writings in band 7, but this study only selected 20 of them randomly as a corpus study. Thus, this study focuses on analyzing these 20 IELTS essay writings. The analysis procedures are described in the following subsection.

For analyzing types of response, this study used a genre approach by employing earlier analytical approaches, using top-down and bottom-up approaches in genre studies (Warsidi, 2021, 2024b; Warsidi, Adnan, et al., 2024; Warsidi, Damayanti, et al., 2024). The purpose is to discover ways of responding to questions used by test takers in their essay writings. For syntactic analysis, this study used an earlier analytical model to discover whether test takers employ simple, complex, compound, or compound-complex sentences (Warsidi, 2023b). Then, it used earlier examples of analysis to discover tense types. The purpose is to find whether test takers use simple present tenses, present perfect, simple past, etc. (Hinkel, 2004). Besides, this study also used an earlier analysis model to discover the level of importance of whether types of response are obligatory, quasi-obligatory, conventional, or optional (Warsidi, 2021; Warsidi, Adnan, et al., 2024; Warsidi, Damayanti, et al., 2024; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024). By employing these series of analysis procedures, the results may become reliable and convincing.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Types of Response and Their Category Status

After analyzing the ways IELTS test takers respond to their essay writing questions, the results showed that they used two types of responses: presenting introductory responses and responding to questions. However, they used explicit and implicit strategies to respond to their essay-writing questions. More details of the present findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Types of Response and Their Category Status in IELTS Essay Band 7**

Types of Response	Total Appearances	Percentages	Category Status in Essay Writing
Presenting introductory response	17	85%	Quasi-obligatory

Types of Response	Total Appearances	Percentages	Category Status in Essay Writing
Responding to questions with:	20	100%	Obligatory
Strategy 1: Explicit responses	16	80%	Conventional
Strategy 2: Implicit responses	4	20%	Optional

Table 1 above shows that the first type of response is presenting an introductory response and this type is quasi-obligatory in the present study. Then, the second type of response is responding to questions, and it is obligatory in IELTS essay writing band 7. However, to respond to questions, IELTS test takers used either explicit or implicit responses. In this regard, they tended to convey it explicitly rather than implicitly. More details about the findings of this study are exemplified and described in the following:

***Presenting introductory responses***

Presenting an introductory response appears at the very beginning of writing before IELTS takers truly respond to the questions. In this regard, IELTS test takers give a short introductory description of the topics being questioned. Here is one example found in the data analysis:

**Question: Living in a country where you have to speak a foreign language can cause serious social problems as well as practical problems. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?**

Living in a country where one must communicate in a foreign language can indeed lead to significant social and practical challenges. Band7-02

The above example shows that the IELTS test taker does not respond directly either agreeing or disagreeing with the statement provided in the question. In this context, the test taker prefers to provide an introductory response before responding to the questions. Thus, the example above is categorized as presenting an introductory response.

***Responding to questions***

In responding to questions in IELTS essay writing tests, test takers in the present study employed two different ways: explicit and implicit responses. However, explicit responses tend to appear more dominant than implicit ones. The ways of employing explicit and implicit responses are exemplified as follows:

*Strategy 1: Explicit responses*

This explicit response means that authors respond to the questions explicitly by mentioning directly what the question requests. An example of this explicit response is presented as follows:

**Question: The only reason that people work hard is to earn money. Do you Agree or disagree?**

Response: While financial gain is one of the incentives for people to work hard, I completely disagree with the view that money is the sole reason for putting in effort in professional life. Band7-01

As exemplified above, a test taker explicitly responds that he/she disagrees with the statement provided. Thus, this type of response includes an explicit strategy because the test taker directly or explicitly responds to the question.

*Strategy 2: Implicit responses*

This strategy is another one to respond to the question. However, this strategy is only optional because it is rarely employed by test takers. The example found from data sets is presented as follows:

**Question: It is not necessary to travel to other places to learn the culture of other people. We can learn just as much from books, films, and the internet. Do you agree or disagree?**

Response: Exploring and learning about culture through travel can provide a more realistic and immersive experience, sparking a deep interest in traditions and offering a firsthand vision of cultural heritage. Band7-03

The above example indicates that a test taker responds to the question in an indirect way because she/ he does not explicitly either agree or disagree with the question request. Thus, it is included as an implicit response.

*Numbers of sentences and their syntactic types in responding to questions*

Regarding sentence analysis in responding to questions, test takers employed one to two sentences of introductory response and one to two sentences of real response. Then, they tend to employ simple sentences in presenting introductory responses and complex sentences in responding to questions. More details about syntactic sentences in responding to questions, Table 2 describes them as follows:

**Table 2. Sentence Numbers and Their Syntactic Types in Responding to Questions**

Types of response	Sentence numbers	Syntactic sentences			
		Simple	Complex	Compound	Compound-complex
Presenting introductory response	22	14	8	0	0
Responding to questions with:	25	8	15	2	0
Strategy 1: Explicit responses	20	5	13	2	0
Strategy 2: Implicit responses	5	3	2	0	0
Total sentences	47	22	23	2	0

As presented in Table 2, IELTS test takers in this study present their introductory responses in simple sentences more than the other sentence types. However, they tend to use complex sentences in responding to questions, in explicit ways. More about their ways of employing sentence types are exemplified as follows:

Simple sentence

**Question: In their advertising, businesses nowadays usually emphasize that their products are new in some way. Why is this? Do you think it is a positive or negative development?**

Response: In recent years, many advertising companies have focused on promoting the uniqueness and novelty of their products to persuade people to buy them. Band7-15

Complex sentence

Response: I believe these advertisements have a negative impact on society **as they encourage overconsumption**, which ultimately harms the environment. Band7-15

Compound sentence

Response: In this case, we can ask our friends for recommendations **or we can find some information** in newspapers or articles. Band7-18

The three examples above are the ways the ways of IELTS test takers employed simple sentences, complex sentences, and compound sentences. Their signals to indicate whether a sentence is simple, complex, or compound are exemplified as bolded text.

*Tenses in Responding to Questions*

Regarding tense analysis in responding to questions in IELTS essay writings, test takers employed three tense types: simple present tense, present perfect, and simple future tense. However, simple present tense appears to be most dominant in the present

findings. More details about tense analysis in responding to essay writing questions are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Tense Forms in Responding to Questions**

Types of response	Sentence numbers	Tense types		
		Simple Present	Present perfect	Simple future
Presenting introductory response	22	18	4	0
Responding to questions with:	25	23	0	2
Strategy 1: Explicit responses	20	18	0	2
Strategy 2: Implicit responses	5	5	0	0
Total sentences	47	41	4	2

The findings above show that test takers prefer employing simple present tense more than the other tense types, either in presenting introductory responses or responding to questions. This finding is interpreted in the discussion section.

In short, the data analysis results revealed that IELTS test takers employed two types of responses to answer their essay writing questions: presenting introductory responses and responding questions. However, they used explicit and implicit strategies in responding to their question, but explicit responses seem more dominant than implicit responses. Then, regarding the uses of syntactic sentences, while test takers tend to employ simple sentences in presenting introductory responses, they tend to use complex sentences to respond to questions. However, in responding to questions, they mostly employed simple sentences more than the other tense types.

The discussion of the present research findings is divided into two sub-sections to accommodate a deeper interpretation and understanding of the present study, regarding presenting introductory responses and responding to questions.

***Presenting Introductory Responses***

This sub-section discusses an introductory response found in the present study, syntactic sentences to present it, and tense types to realize it. Presenting introductory responses is quasi-obligatory in the present data sets, which means that it is very important to respond to questions in a test of IELTS essay writing. This step aims to provide background information to readers as a primary introduction. In this regard, test takers may intend to provide background information to their targeted readers as likely in other academic writings, such as in the discussion section of research articles

that always begin with background information (Joseph & Lim, 2018). Thus, they may perceive that they can continue the writing with more details.

To realize this step, test takers tend to employ simple sentences more than the other sentence types. The reason may be that test takers just want to give a clue as primary or opening information to their targeted audience. Thus they may think it to provide simple information in simple ways to their audiences, as likely in the abstract of research articles, authors always begin their introductory sentences with a simple sentence (Warsidi, 2021) or even in a whole research article (Warsidi, 2023b).

Besides, to realize introductory responses, test takers in the present data sets tend to use simple present tenses more than the other tense types. The reason for this finding is much influenced by the provided topics and questions. For example, the questions include What is your opinion, do you agree or disagree, to what extent do you agree, what do you think, etc. All these questions imply that the responses need to be in the present form, and thus, authors prefer employing simple present tenses more than the other sentence types. However, this finding seems different from those found in 14 students' essay writings that used past tenses in irregular verbs more than regular verbs (Fitria, 2021). The reason for this difference may be that the focus of the study is to find regular and irregular verbs, which can only be identified through past stories and past writings. Thus, the results must be in the past tense forms.

### ***Responding Questions***

Responding to questions is obligatory in the present data sets. However, IELTS test takers used two ways to respond to questions in IELTS essay writing: explicit and implicit responses, but explicit ways appear to be more dominant over implicit ways. The reason for this finding may be that test takers aim to show their responses explicitly to their examiners and to provide real clues that they are aware of the topics and have sufficient knowledge of the provided topics. Thus, they prefer responding to questions in explicit and direct ways. The purpose of the explicit response may be that test takers intend to avoid misunderstanding, and, thus prefer to use explicit information. This perception may be related to explicit instruction given, as likely in Aydin (2023) that students with explicit instructions outperformed those with implicit instruction.

However, unlike the sentence types in presenting introductory responses, test takers tend to employ complex sentences in responding to questions. There are two possible reasons for this finding. First, test takers possibly intend to show complex ideas

to their examiners, and thus, they communicate them in complex ways. Another reason is that test takers aim to show their ability to their examiners that they have the capability and knowledge to manage big and complex ideas, and to do so, they communicate the idea in complex ways.

Moreover, in responding to questions, IELTS test takers in the present study also tend to use simple present tenses more than the other tense types. This finding means that test takers present their ideas in real situations, neither past issues nor future issues. The reason is also similar to earlier sub-sections in that they are much influenced by the available topics and questions which encourage them to employ simple present tenses. The possible reason is that essay writing is descriptive texts, which encourages test takers to employ simple present tense more over the other tense forms (Astri et al., 2023; Sepriandi & Rachmijati, 2025). In short, these findings showed that responding to IELTS questions are obligatory, and to do so, most test takers prefer explicit responses using simple sentences. These imply that prioritizing understanding in IELTS essay writing to targeted readers is critically important, and thus, they used explicit and simple responses.

## **CONCLUSION**

After analyzing data, presenting the results, and discussing them with literature, this study finally concludes with three important findings. Firstly, IELTS test takers in this study used two types of responses to answer their essay writing questions. They are presenting introductory responses and responding to questions, either explicitly or implicitly. Secondly, however, while test takers tend to employ simple sentences in presenting introductory responses, they tend to use complex sentences to respond to questions. Thirdly, they mostly employed simple sentences more than the other tense types.

These findings may contribute to both knowledge findings for the literature and practical implications for future test takers regarding how to start writing their essays practically in their IELTS tests. In this regard, test takers need to start their essay writing with an introductory response. After that, they need to answer the questions explicitly. Unfortunately, this study contains limitations as it only analyzed how to respond to questions. It still has not provided a complete understanding, and thus, this study

recommends future research to analyze communicative strategies in whole IELTS essay writing, and thus, the results may provide more comprehensive findings.

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