



A WHITE BUS

Build Better IELTS Sentences.

Choose the meaning. Pick the link. Join the ideas.

A practical guide to complex sentences for IELTS Writing and Speaking: a memory method, word choice by meaning, common mistakes, model answers and practice with an answer key.

THE PATTERN

Although public transport is cheap,
it can be crowded.

supporting idea + main idea

THE SIMPLE RULE

1

MEANING

What is the second idea doing?

2

LINK

Choose the conjunction.

3

SENTENCE

Put both ideas together.

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START HERE

One sentence. Two jobs.

A complex sentence has one main idea and one supporting idea.

SUPPORTING CLAUSE · dependent

Although online classes are flexible,

Adds contrast. It starts with a conjunction and cannot stand alone. It needs the main idea to feel complete.

MAIN CLAUSE · independent

some students prefer classrooms.

Carries the message. It has its own subject and verb, so it can stand alone.

FULL SENTENCE

Although online classes are flexible, some students prefer classrooms.

FAST CHECK

Find the part that can stand alone. That is usually your main idea. If a part feels unfinished (“Although online classes are flexible.”), it is the supporting idea.

THREE SENTENCE TYPES**SIMPLE**

One main clause.

Buses are cheap.

COMPOUND

Two equal clauses joined by **and**, **but**, **so**, or **or**.

Buses are cheap, but they can be crowded.

COMPLEX

A main clause plus a supporting clause.

Although buses are cheap, they can be crowded.

Compound sentences give both ideas equal weight. In a complex sentence one idea supports the other, so the relationship (reason, contrast, condition, time) is clearer to the reader.

WHY IT MATTERS IN IELTS

Grammatical Range and Accuracy is one of the four criteria in both Writing and Speaking, and each criterion carries equal weight. The band descriptors reward a **mix of simple and complex sentences** and, at higher bands, control and accuracy. Complex does not mean long: a short, correct complex sentence beats a long, confusing one.

THE MNEMONIC

A WHITE BUS

Keep the sequence. Pick only the conjunction that matches your meaning.

	MAIN LINK	ALSO USEFUL	MEANING	EXAMPLE
A	ALTHOUGH	after, as	Contrast; time	Although rent is high, many people move to cities.
W	WHEN / WHILE	whenever, where, whereas	Time; contrast; place	When prices rise, people usually spend less.
H	HOW	–	Manner; method	The chart shows how energy use has changed.
I	IF	in case	Condition; precaution	If cities improve buses, fewer people may drive.
T	THOUGH	than	Soft contrast; comparison	Though it is small, I like my hometown.
E	EVEN THOUGH	even if	Strong contrast; unlikely condition	Even though it is expensive, many people study abroad.
B	BECAUSE	before	Reason; time	Because housing costs are high, some students work part-time.
U	UNLESS	until	Negative condition; time limit	Unless the government acts, congestion will get worse.
S	SINCE / SO THAT	–	Reason; purpose	Schools teach digital safety so that students use technology safely.

START WITH THESE

although · because · if · when · while · unless · so that

LEVEL UP LATER

even though · whereas · since · as · before · after · until · in case

The letters help you remember the list. In an essay or an answer, you never need all of them. Ask what the second idea is doing first, then pick one link.

CHOOSE BY MEANING

Choose the job. Then choose the link.

You do not need every word. You need the right relationship.

REASON

Why?

because · since · as
Because housing costs are high, some students work part-time.

CONTRAST

Different idea?

although · though · even though · while · whereas
Although buses are cheap, they can be crowded.

CONDITION

What if?

if · unless · in case
If cities improve buses, fewer people may drive.

TIME

When?

when · whenever · while · before · after · until · as
When I study at home, I keep my phone away.

PURPOSE

For what purpose?

so that

Schools can teach digital safety **so that** students use technology safely.

PLACE

Where?

where

Cities **where** public transport is reliable often have less traffic.

MANNER

How?

how

The chart shows **how** energy use has changed over time.

CONTRAST LINKS: FROM COMPARING TO STRESSING
while / whereas

compare two things side by side

though

softer, common in speaking

although

standard, works in any style

even though

stronger, stresses a fact

Tip: the same word can do two jobs. **While** can show time or contrast, and **since** can show time or reason. The rest of the sentence tells you which one you mean.

WORD GUIDE

Similar words. Different jobs.

Six groups that learners often mix up, with a quick way to choose.

although · though · even though

All three show contrast. **Although** is the standard choice, **though** is lighter and common in speaking, **even though** is stronger. **Even if** is different: it talks about a possibility.

Even though it rained, we went out. (it did rain)

Even if it rains, we will go out. (maybe it will)

while · whereas

While can mean “at the same time” or show contrast. **Whereas** only shows contrast. Both are useful for comparing two things.

While I was studying, my phone rang.

Rents are high in cities, **whereas** they are lower in villages.

because · since · as

Because gives the most direct reason. **Since** and **as** suggest the reader already knows the reason and usually start the sentence. **Since** can also mean “from a point in time”.

Since it was late, we left early.

I have lived here **since** 2019.

if · unless · in case

Unless means “if not”, so do not add another negative. **In case** is a precaution: you act before the problem happens.

Unless you practise, you will not improve.

Take an umbrella **in case** it rains.

so that · so

So that shows purpose and is usually followed by can, could, will or would. **So** alone shows a result and joins two main clauses.

She saved money **so that** she could study abroad.

The road was closed, **so** the bus was late.

before · after · until · when

Time order: **before** = earlier, **after** = later, **until** = up to that moment, **when** = at that time.

Check your answers **after** you finish.

Wait **until** the water boils.

THREE WAYS TO USE IF**GENERAL TRUTH**

If you heat ice, it melts.

present + present

REAL FUTURE

If governments invest in buses, congestion may fall.

present + will / may + verb

UNREAL OR UNLIKELY

If I lived abroad, I would miss my family.

past + would + verb

Do not use **will** inside the if, when, unless, before, after or until clause when you mean the future. Write “If the government **invests**...”, not “If the government will invest...”.

BUILD IT

Think. Link. Build.

Start with two ideas. Name the relationship. Then choose the link.

1

TWO IDEAS

City life offers many opportunities.
City life can be stressful.

2

RELATIONSHIP

The ideas contrast.

3

LINK

Use **although**.

FINAL SENTENCE

Although city life offers many opportunities, it can be stressful.

COMMA RULE

SUPPORT FIRST

Use a comma.

Although it is expensive,
I enjoy living there.

MAIN FIRST

Usually no comma.

I enjoy living there
although it is expensive.

Exception: when **while** or **whereas** shows contrast in the middle of a sentence, a comma is normal: Some people prefer cities, whereas others prefer villages.

TRY FOUR BUILDS

TWO IDEAS	RELATIONSHIP	LINK	SENTENCE
Exercise is healthy. Many people have no time for it.	contrast	although	Although exercise is healthy, many people have no time for it.
Rents are rising. Young people stay with their parents.	reason	because	Because rents are rising, young people stay with their parents.
Cities build cycle lanes. More people may cycle.	condition	if	If cities build cycle lanes, more people may cycle.
Schools teach coding. Students prepare for future jobs.	purpose	so that	Schools teach coding so that students prepare for future jobs.

AVOID

Seven common mistakes.

Accuracy matters as much as variety. Check these before you write or speak.

1 Two connectors for one link

WRONG

Although it is cheap, **but** it is crowded.
Because it rained, **so** we stayed home.

RIGHT

Although it is cheap, it is crowded.
Because it rained, we stayed home.

2 Unfinished sentence (fragment)

WRONG

Although public transport is cheap.

RIGHT

Although public transport is cheap, it can be crowded.

A supporting clause always needs a main clause.

3 Comma splice

WRONG

Public transport is cheap, it is crowded.

RIGHT

Public transport is cheap, **but** it is crowded.
Although public transport is cheap, it is crowded.

4 Will after if or when

WRONG

If the government **will invest** in buses, traffic will fall.

RIGHT

If the government **invests** in buses, traffic will fall.

Use the present simple in the if, when, unless clause.

5 Double negative after unless

WRONG

Unless you **don't** practise, you won't improve.

RIGHT

Unless you practise, you won't improve.

Unless already means "if not".

6 The link does not match the meaning

WRONG

Because online classes are flexible, some students prefer classrooms.

RIGHT

Although online classes are flexible, some students prefer classrooms.

Ask what the second idea is doing first.

7 Because of / despite + clause

WRONG

Because of housing is expensive, many people rent.

RIGHT

Because housing is expensive, many people rent.
Because of expensive housing, many people rent.

Clause: because, although. Noun: because of, despite.

SELF-CHECK

1. Does each clause have its own subject and verb?
2. Is there only one link between the two ideas?
3. Does the link match the meaning?
4. Did I add a comma after an opening supporting clause?

USE IT IN WRITING

Make the relationship easy to see.

One clear relationship is enough. Make the link obvious to the reader.

REASON	Because housing costs are rising, many young adults live with their parents longer.
CONTRAST	Although technology makes communication easier, it can reduce face-to-face interaction.
CONDITION	If governments invest in public transport, traffic congestion may decrease.
PURPOSE	Schools should teach digital literacy so that students can use technology safely.

MODEL PARAGRAPH · Task 2: Should public transport be free?

Free public transport sounds attractive, but it raises difficult questions. **Although** passengers would save money, someone still has to pay for the service. **Because** fuel and maintenance are expensive, the money would have to come from taxes. **Unless** this money is spent carefully, other public services could suffer. However, **if** cities invest wisely, cleaner air and less traffic may outweigh the cost. Governments could also charge low fares **so that** services remain sustainable.

Although contrast · **Because** reason · **Unless** negative condition · **if** condition · **so that** purpose

WHERE TO USE THEM

Put complex sentences where you **explain and evaluate**: reasons, contrasts and conditions in the body paragraphs. Keep your main claim easy to find in the topic sentence, and mix short sentences with longer ones so the paragraph reads naturally.

ONE RULE

Do not collect connectors. Choose the one that shows the relationship clearly.

USE IT IN WRITING

Task 1: describe, do not explain.

In Academic Task 1, complex sentences help you compare data and describe processes in fewer, clearer sentences.

COMPARE DATA

while · whereas

Car use rose sharply, **whereas** cycling declined.**While** buses carried the most passengers, trains carried the fewest.**SHOW SEQUENCE**

before · after · when · until

After the milk is collected, it is transported to a factory.The mixture is heated **until** it melts.**STATE A PURPOSE**

so that

The water is filtered **so that** harmful particles are removed.**INTRODUCE A CHART**

how

The chart shows **how** household spending changed between 2000 and 2020.**CHANGE AT THE SAME TIME**

as · while

As the population grew, demand for housing increased.**CAREFUL WITH BECAUSE**

In Academic Task 1, report what the data shows. Do not invent reasons that are not in the chart, map or process.

WRONGSales fell **because** customers lost interest.**RIGHT**Sales fell steadily, **while** exports rose.**CHANGE THE ORDER TO KEEP IT NATURAL****Although** sales fell, exports rose.Exports rose **although** sales fell.Sales fell, **whereas** exports rose.

The same information, three shapes. Avoid starting every sentence with the same link.

USE IT IN SPEAKING

Answer first. Then add one useful link.

Keep the answer natural. Add one link when it gives a reason, contrast, condition or time detail.

PART 1 Do you like your hometown?

Although it is small, I like it **because** it is peaceful.

PART 1 Do you enjoy reading?

I usually read **before** I go to bed.

PART 1 Do you use public transport?

I take the bus **when** I go to university.

PART 1 Would you like to live abroad?

I would consider it **if** I found a good opportunity.

PART 2 Describe a place you like to visit.

I'd like to talk about the library near my home. I go there **whenever** I need a quiet place to study, and **although** it is small, it has everything I need.

PART 3 Do people rely too much on technology?

In some ways, yes. **Although** technology saves time, people can lose basic skills **if** they depend on it too much.

SPEAKING TIPS

One good link per answer is enough. Too many make you sound rehearsed.

Finish simply if you get lost. A short correct sentence is better than a broken long one.

Speak in chunks. Pause at the comma: "Although it is small, (pause) I like it."

Unreal situations use if + past simple + would: "I would consider it if I found..."

YOUR TURN

Choose one: because, although, when or if. Use it in one answer. Then say the same answer with a different link.

PRACTICE

Exercises: choose and combine.

Write your answers first. Check them on the answer key (page 13).

A. CHOOSE THE BEST LINK

- | | | |
|---|---|----------------------|
| 1 | _____ the buses were late, many students missed the first lesson. | Because / Although |
| 2 | _____ online classes are flexible, some students feel isolated. | Because / Although |
| 3 | Traffic may decrease _____ governments invest in public transport. | if / unless |
| 4 | You will not improve _____ you practise regularly. | if / unless |
| 5 | Schools should teach digital skills _____ students can use technology safely. | so that / although |
| 6 | I usually check my email _____ I start work. | before / unless |
| 7 | Some people prefer cities, _____ others prefer the countryside. | whereas / because |
| 8 | _____ it was raining heavily, the match continued. | Even though / Unless |

B. COMBINE THE IDEAS USING THE LINK IN BRACKETS

- 1 Cycling is healthy. Many people do not cycle to work. **(although)**

- 2 Rents are rising. Many young people live with their parents. **(because)**

- 3 Cities build more cycle lanes. More people may cycle. **(if)**

- 4 Governments should fund research. Scientists can find new treatments. **(so that)**

- 5 You finish the exercise. Check your answers. **(after)**

PRACTICE

Exercises: fix, speak and write.

Use what you have learned. Then compare your answers with the model answers.

C. FIND AND FIX THE MISTAKE

- 1 Although the course is expensive, but it is useful.

- 2 If the government will build more roads, traffic will increase.

- 3 Because of housing is expensive, many young people rent.

- 4 Unless you don't revise, you may forget the rules.

- 5 Although public transport is cheap.

D. SPEAKING: ANSWER IN ONE SENTENCE WITH THE LINK GIVEN

- 1 Do you like your studies or your job? **(although)**

- 2 Why do you use your phone so much? **(because)**

- 3 What will you do this weekend? **(if)**

- 4 When do you feel most relaxed? **(when)**

E. WRITING TASK 2: TWO SENTENCES, TWO DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS

Should governments spend more money on public transport?

Write two sentences. Use two different links from this guide (for example, contrast and condition).

ANSWER KEY

Check your answers.

Model answers for B, D and E may vary. What matters is a correct link that matches the meaning.

A. CHOOSE THE BEST LINK

- | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Because | 2. Although | 3. if | 4. unless |
| 5. so that | 6. before | 7. whereas | 8. Even though |

B. MODEL SENTENCES

- 1 **Although** cycling is healthy, many people do not cycle to work.
- 2 **Because** rents are rising, many young people live with their parents.
- 3 **If** cities build more cycle lanes, more people may cycle.
- 4 Governments should fund research **so that** scientists can find new treatments.
- 5 **After** you finish the exercise, check your answers.

C. CORRECTIONS

- 1 **Although the course is expensive, it is useful.**
Delete **but**. Although already shows the contrast.
- 2 **If the government builds more roads, traffic will increase.**
No **will** in the if clause.
- 3 **Because housing is expensive, many young people rent.**
Because + clause. (Or: Because of expensive housing.)
- 4 **Unless you revise, you may forget the rules.**
Unless already means "if not".
- 5 **Although public transport is cheap, it can be crowded.**
Add a main clause to finish the sentence.

D. SAMPLE SPEAKING ANSWERS

- 1 **Although** my course is difficult, I really enjoy it.
- 2 I use my phone a lot **because** I chat with friends and study on it.
- 3 **If** the weather is good, I will go to the park with my family.
- 4 I feel most relaxed **when** I listen to music in the evening.

E. SAMPLE TASK 2 ANSWER

Although building new railways is expensive, it can reduce traffic in the long term. **If** more people use trains, cities may become cleaner and quieter.



QUICK REFERENCE

One page to keep beside you.

Meaning first. Then link. Then sentence.

MEANING	LINKS	EXAMPLE
REASON	because, since, as	Because rents are rising, many young adults stay at home.
CONTRAST	although, though, even though, while, whereas	Although buses are cheap, they can be crowded.
CONDITION	if, unless, in case	If cities improve buses, fewer people may drive.
TIME	when, whenever, while, before, after, until, as	When I study at home, I keep my phone away.
PURPOSE	so that	Schools teach digital safety so that students use technology safely.
PLACE / MANNER	where, how	The chart shows how energy use has changed.

PUNCTUATION

Support first: use a comma.

Main first: usually no comma.

While / whereas (contrast) in the middle: comma.

GRAMMAR

No **but** after although. No **so** after because.

No **will** after if, when, unless.

No negative after **unless**.

Because / although + clause. Because of / despite + noun.

THE 3-STEP ROUTINE**1****MEANING**

What is the second idea doing?

2**LINK**

Choose one conjunction that fits.

3**CHECK**

Two clauses, one link, comma if needed.



PRACTICE

Use it again while the pattern is fresh.

Choose two links. Use each one in a new sentence. A short daily routine works better than one long session.

DAY 1

because

Write 3 reasons about your city or your studies.

DAY 2

although

Write 3 contrast sentences about technology.

DAY 3

if

Write 3 conditions about transport or education.

DAY 4

when · before · after

Describe your daily routine in 3 sentences.

DAY 5

unless · so that

Write one sentence each about health and study habits.

DAY 6

while · whereas

Compare two things: cities and villages, books and screens.

DAY 7

mix

Write one Task 2 paragraph with at least three different links.

SPEAK IT

Record yourself

Say each sentence aloud once. Listen for a natural pause at the comma.

KEEP PRACTISING

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