

Why Chinese Candidates Plateau at 6.5

证据简报 · 中国考生为何卡在 6.5

A practitioner's catalogue of first-language transfer patterns, and the criterion each one costs marks under.

A candidate who reaches 6.5 has already proved they can communicate in English. What stops them at 7 is a small, predictable set of patterns produced by the distance between Mandarin and English — and those patterns are teachable.

能考到 6.5，说明沟通能力已经过关。真正卡住 7 分的，是中英文结构差异带来的一小组可预测的固定问题 —— 而这些是可以教会的。

THREE FINDINGS 三个结论

It is not ability 不是能力问题	None of the recurring errors below reflect intelligence, effort or vocabulary size. They are the predictable consequences of how the first language encodes tense, number, definiteness and argument order.
The errors repeat 错误高度重复	Across a decade of marking, the same short list recurs. Most candidates carry three or four of them, not all of them — which is why a personal diagnosis beats a generic course.
The deepest layer is rhetorical 最深的一层是修辞	Vocabulary and grammar are the visible layers, and the ones every course addresses. The layer that actually caps Coherence & Cohesion is the order in which an argument is delivered — and it is almost never taught.

PART ONE · SPEAKING 母语迁移的四个层次

Four layers of transfer

Most preparation material addresses only the third.

大多数备考资料只讲第三层。

LAYER	MECHANISM	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE	COSTS
1 • Sound 语音层	他 · 她 · 它 are written differently but pronounced identically. Under pressure the tongue reaches for whichever form arrives first.	<i>"My mother — he works in a hospital..."</i>	GRA
2 • Grammar 语法层	Mandarin links a subject straight to an adjective, with no copula, and verbs do not inflect for time — 我去 and 我去了 differ by a particle, not by the verb.	<i>"She very tired." · "I interested in music." · "Last year the figure rise sharply."</i>	GRA
3 • Lexis 词汇层	Chinese collocations translated word for word. The meaning survives; the English does not. The layer nearly every course teaches — and the easiest to fix.	<i>"open the light" · "play my phone" · "learn knowledge" · "I very like it"</i>	LR
4 • Rhetoric 修辞层	Classical Chinese rhetoric builds toward its conclusion — 起承转合 — placing the point at the end. English states the point first, then reasons, then evidence. Every sentence can be grammatically perfect and the answer still read as unfocused.	<i>Background before any position · a Part 3 answer that never lands an opinion · circling back instead of developing</i>	CC TR

The ranking that matters. One Layer 4 problem outweighs several at Layer 3. Coherence is assessed on whether the examiner can follow the argument — not on how many words the candidate knows.

第四层出现一个问题，比第三层出现几个更严重。

PART TWO · WRITING 七项高影响修正

Seven fixes, mapped to the criteria

The same transfer patterns surface in Writing, where they are permanent on the page rather than fleeting in speech. Most candidates carry three or four of these repeatedly, not all seven.

同样的迁移问题在写作中会白纸黑字留下来。大多数考生反复出现的只有其中三四项，而不是全部七项。

#	FIX	CRITERION
1	Mark every verb for tense and subject agreement 每个动词都标时态与主谓一致	GRA
2	Add articles (a / an / the) before singular countable nouns 单数可数名词前补冠词	GRA
3	Never pluralise uncountable nouns (research, information, advice) 不可数名词不加 s	LR GRA
4	Break comma splices with a conjunction or semicolon 拆开逗号连句	GRA
5	State the point first, then explain (P-E-E-C order) 先给观点，再解释	CC
6	Replace translated idioms and 成语 with natural collocations 成语直译换成地道搭配	LR
7	Commit to and defend a clear position 明确表态并论证到底	TR

WORKED EVIDENCE 实例对照

TRANSFER ERROR	CORRECTED	WHY
The graph show that sales increase in 2010.	The graph shows that sales increased in 2010.	Past data takes past simple; <i>show</i> needs third-person -s.
Government must do more researches.	The government must do more research .	Shared reference takes <i>the</i> ; <i>research</i> is uncountable.
Pollution is serious, we must act.	Pollution is serious, so we must act.	Comma splice — two full clauses need a conjunction or semicolon.
People mountain people sea (人山人海)	large crowds / densely populated	Translate the meaning, not the image.
Both views have their own advantages and disadvantages.	While public transport has clear benefits, I firmly believe private cars remain essential for rural communities.	An opinion task requires a stated, defended position. “It depends” gives the examiner nothing to reward.

On memorised openers. “With the development of society...”, “Every coin has two sides” and “As is known to all...” are drilled so widely that they are recognised on sight. They do not merely fail to add marks — they signal that what follows may be rehearsed.

这些开头考官一听就知道是背的 —— 不是不加分，而是会让后面的内容都显得可疑。

WHY GLOBAL MATERIALS CANNOT CLOSE THIS GAP 为什么全球通用教材解决不了

The arithmetic	A textbook written for a worldwide readership must serve candidates whose first languages already mark tense, already use articles, and already front their arguments. Space spent on article use is wasted on a Spanish speaker; space spent on 起承转合 is meaningless to anyone outside the Sinosphere. The result is material that is correct for everyone and decisive for no one.
What follows	The fixes here are narrow by design. They are not a syllabus — they are the short list that separates a competent 6.5 from a 7 for this specific population. A candidate who resolves their own three or four has removed the most common reasons marks are lost, without studying anything a global course would have prioritised.

What it does not claim	Fixing these patterns does not produce a band score. Results depend on starting level, test-day performance and examiner variation, and no material can promise otherwise. What a fix list can honestly offer is the removal of predictable, self-inflicted deductions.
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HOW THIS WAS COMPILED 编制方法说明

Source	A practitioner's catalogue, assembled across roughly ten years of one-to-one teaching, mock interviews and marked scripts with Chinese candidates in Beijing, and set out in full in the Deen Cox IELTS Series.
Status of the claims	This is professional judgement, not measurement. No frequencies are quoted because none were formally counted; "most common" here means most common in one teacher's caseload. It is offered as a practitioner's observation that other teachers can test against their own students — not as research.
On the descriptors	The assessment criteria are referred to by name and paraphrased. The official band descriptors are not reproduced here; they are published by the IELTS partners and should be read at source.
Credentials	Certified by IDP Education in Understanding the Assessment Criteria for both Speaking and Writing. IDP is one of the three organisations that jointly own IELTS, alongside the British Council and Cambridge University Press & Assessment. This is a teacher-training certificate — IELTS has not endorsed this briefing, the books, or the classes.

Corrections welcome. If you teach this population and your experience differs, say so. A catalogue that cannot be challenged is not evidence.

如果你也教这一群体，而观察与此不同，欢迎指出。无法被质疑的清单不算证据。

DIAGNOSE YOUR OWN PATTERN 找出你自己的那三四个问题

The L1 Transfer Self-Check 母语迁移自查表	A four-layer recording audit. Record three Part 1 answers and one Part 2 response, play them back, and tick what you actually hear — not what you remember saying.
The Chinglish Swap Table 中式英语替换表	Direct-translation traps, memorised openers and confusable pairs, each with a natural replacement.
The full briefing online 完整网页版	deencoxelts.com/briefing.html — the same material with every layer expanded.

Part One is set out in Chapter 12 of *IELTS Speaking Mastery: The Complete Band 7+ Guide*; the seven fixes open *IELTS Academic Writing: Complete Band 7+ Guide*. Both free tools above are downloadable at deencoxelts.com with no sign-up.