

1. 'traffic' topic (ebook--topic22 in page 46)

Traffic congestion is becoming a huge problem for many major cities. Suggest some measures that could be taken to reduce traffic in big cities.

Nowadays, it is obvious that the congestion **in nearly all over the world** is on the increase and cities are becoming busier. In my opinion, this problem must be tackled because it is a global issue and **most of people, especially who live** in big cities, **are suffering from that**.

One of the main **reasons which causes the traffic jam** is that the majority of people prefer using their own cars instead of public transportation. However, it is not impossible to find good and effective ways to control the congestion. Public transportation is the easiest way to solve this **trouble**. If there **are comfortable and cheap public transportations**, such as trains and buses, **they will make people like to use them better than drive**. For instance, in Manchester, Stagecoach buses are the most convenient buses that help **the city to have comfortable life in its** roads and streets during rush hours. In fact, governments should provide much better public transportation and charge prices that are affordable for everyone.

Another solution to solve **that** is to charge **the** congestion fee for every car that will go into a city centre. **It will** either discourage people from driving into that area, or raise more money for public transportation. A good example of this situation is London, which now has a congestion charge. Going to the city centre in London costs about £8 per day.

In conclusion, the problem of traffic congestion can be tackled by improving public transportation and by charging drivers who enter city centres. (255 words)

Feedback:

- Good introduction: you introduce the topic and answer the question in a simple way.
- You give 2 solutions which are organised in 2 good paragraphs. Each paragraph develops the main point well. Good examples for each point.
- Ideas are well-linked and developed logically.
- You use some 'band 7' vocabulary e.g. on the increase, tackle a problem, prices that are affordable, discourage people, raise money, congestion charge.
- Excellent conclusion to summarise the ideas.
- The essay could be improved by reducing the number of small mistakes. However, there are several sentences that contain no mistakes at all.
- Overall, band 7.

Nowadays, it is obvious that the congestion **in most countries** is on the increase and cities are becoming busier. In my opinion, this problem must be tackled because it is a global issue and **most people, especially who live** in big cities, **are affected by it**.

One of the main **causes of traffic jams** is that the majority of people prefer using their own cars instead of public transportation. However, it is not impossible to find good and effective ways to control the congestion. Public transportation is the easiest way to solve this **problem**. If there **is** comfortable and cheap public **transportation** such as trains and buses, **people will choose to use it rather than drive**. For instance, in Manchester, Stagecoach buses are the most convenient buses that help **to reduce the traffic on** roads and streets during rush hours. In fact, governments should provide much better public transportation and charge prices that are affordable for everyone.

Another solution to solve **the traffic problem** is to charge **a** congestion fee for every car that will go into a city centre. **This will** either discourage people from driving into that area, or raise more money for public transportation. A good example of this situation is London, which now has a congestion charge. Going to the city centre in London costs about £8 per day.

In conclusion, the problem of traffic congestion can be tackled by improving public transportation and by charging drivers who enter city centres. (255 words)

in most countries

most people, especially who live are affected by it

causes of traffic jams / reasons for traffic jams

(uncountable, no plural "s")

problem is...transportation people will choose to use it rather than drive to reduce the traffic on

(say what "that" is)

the traffic problem a This will

2. IELTS Advice: the "Firstly, Secondly, Finally" structure

Is the phrase "First and foremost" better than "Firstly"? The answer is NO.

Using simple organising language like "Firstly, Secondly" makes you focus on the REAL CONTENT of what you are writing - **topic vocabulary, collocations, examples. This is what the examiner wants to see.**

Spend your time preparing ideas, opinions and examples for IELTS topics, not learning alternative ways to write "Firstly".

3. 'immigration' topic (ebook--topic10 in page 29,30)

Here is a paragraph giving some of the economic benefits of immigration:

From an economic perspective, immigration can be extremely positive. Many immigrants have skills that are needed in the country they move to. For example, countries sometimes lack key workers like doctors and nurses, and immigration is therefore encouraged. Immigrants who find work contribute to the economy of their new country with the skills they bring and the taxes they pay. At the same time, many immigrants send money to help family members in their home country, therefore helping to boost that economy too.

4. using examples--government & own decisions

Sometimes, the best way to think of ideas for an essay is to start with an example. One good example can give you enough ideas for a full paragraph.

Look at the following question: ***Should governments make decisions about people's lifestyle, or should people make their own decisions?***

This question seems difficult, but if you take "smoking" as an example of a lifestyle choice, it becomes a lot easier. Here's my paragraph:

In some cases, governments can help people to make better lifestyle choices. In the UK, for example, smoking is now banned in all workplaces, and it is even prohibited for people to smoke in restaurants, bars and pubs. As a result, many people who used to smoke socially have now given up. At the same time, the government has ensured that cigarette prices keep going up, and there have been several campaigns to highlight the health risks of smoking. These measures have also helped to reduce the number of smokers in this country.

PS. There is a useful chapter about 'government and society' in Simon's [ebook--topic11, page31,32](#).

5. 'parents and children' topic (ebook--topic7--working parents in page25)

Many people believe that parents are not as close to their children as they used to be. Suggest some reasons why this could be true.

Here is an example paragraph about the above topic:

Parents and their children seem to be less close nowadays. Perhaps the main reason for this is that both parents often work full-time and therefore spend less time with their children. Whereas women traditionally stayed at home to cook, clean and look after children, many mothers now choose to work or are forced to do so. This means that children may be left alone, or with nannies or babysitters. Busy parents have less contact with their children and less energy to enjoy family activities. Many families no longer eat meals together, and children are given the freedom to go out with friends, watch television or chat on the Internet for hours.

Please note: A full IELTS question would **also ask you to suggest how families could become closer.**

I've had some great responses about the video lesson, but some students were surprised that you can get a band 9 using "Firstly, Secondly, Finally".

6.1 how to write an introduction (Wednesday, August 04, 2010)

Here is an example of an IELTS Task 2 question:

As **computers** are being used more and more **in education**, there will soon be **no role for the teacher in the classroom**. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here is my introduction:

It is true that computers have become an essential tool for teachers and students in all areas of education. However, while computers are extremely useful, I do not agree with the idea that they could soon replace teachers completely.

6.2 main body paragraphs (Wednesday, August 11, 2010)

Main body "advantages" paragraph (band 9): (ebook-topic5 in page17)

There are several advantages to using computers in education. Firstly, students learn new skills which will be extremely useful for their future jobs. For example, they learn to write reports or other documents using a word processor, and they can practise doing spoken presentations using PowerPoint slides. Secondly, technology is a powerful tool to engage students. The use of websites or online videos can make lessons much more interesting, and many students are more motivated to do homework or research using online resources. Finally, if each student has a computer to work on, they can study at their own pace.

7. "Band 7 Vocabulary" (Wednesday, August 25, 2010)

Advantages of studying abroad: (ebook-topic5 in page16)

Many students choose to study abroad because there are greater opportunities in a particular foreign country. Foreign universities may offer better facilities or courses. They may also be more prestigious than universities in the student's own country and have teachers who are experts in their fields. Therefore, by studying abroad, students can expand their knowledge and gain qualifications that open the door to better job opportunities. A period of study abroad can also broaden students' horizons. In the new country, they will have to live and work with other students of various nationalities. Thus, overseas students are exposed to different cultures, customs and points of view.

8. education / practical skills (Wednesday, September 15, 2010)

1. Introduce the topic then give your opinion

I would write that it is true that children learn academic subjects at school, but not many practical skills. However, I would then disagree that schools should teach skills like bank account management and car maintenance.

2. First supporting paragraph

I would write a paragraph about the importance of academic subjects like maths, science, languages etc. We live in a knowledge-based economy where independent thinking and problem solving are the most important skills. With timetables already full, schools do not have time to teach children anything else.

3. Second supporting paragraph

I would argue that bank account management is a 'life skill' that anyone can learn by simply opening a bank account. Most adults have no problem managing their finances without being taught accounting lessons at school. Other skills like car maintenance are not really necessary. Most people take their cars to a qualified mechanic.

4. Conclusion

Repeat the idea that schools are already doing a good job teaching the traditional academic subjects. If they start to teach practical skills, the study of important academic subjects will suffer.

For IELTS Writing Task 2, keep your introduction short and simple. Don't waste time writing a long introduction; the main body paragraphs are more important.

A good IELTS Writing introduction needs only 2 things:

1. A sentence that introduces the topic
2. A sentence that gives a short, general answer to the question

1. In the first sentence I introduce the topic of computers in education.
2. In the second sentence I answer the question and make my opinion clear. Don't wait until the conclusion to give your opinion.

After you introduction (see last week's lesson) you need to write 2 or 3 main body paragraphs. This is the most important part of your essay.

It's a great example of how to write an "advantages" paragraph **using a "firstly, secondly, finally" structure**.

When I say "band 7 vocabulary", I'm really talking about vocabulary that could help you to get a band 7 or higher. **Examiners are looking for "less common" words and phrases, correct and relevant collocations, and maybe some idiomatic language.**

*Some people think that school children need to **learn practical skills such as car maintenance or bank account management along with the academic subjects at school**. To what extent do you agree or disagree?*

Here are some suggestions (this is NOT an essay)

9.1 IELTS Writing Task 2: crime topic (ebook topic4 in page 14,15)

Here is a "problem/solution" question, with some ideas for an essay below:

Many criminals re-offend after they have been punished. Why do some people continue to commit crimes after they have been punished, and what measures can be taken to tackle this problem?

Causes of crime and re-offending:

- The main causes of crime are poverty, unemployment and lack of education.
- People who commit crimes often have no other way of making a living.
- The prison system can make the situation worse.
- Offenders mix with other criminals who can be a negative influence.
- A criminal record makes finding a job more difficult.
- Many prisoners re-offend when they are released.

Possible measures to reduce crime and re-offending:

- Prisons should provide education or vocational training.
- Rehabilitation programmes prepare prisoners for release into society.
- Community service is another way to reform offenders.
- It makes offenders useful in their local communities.
- They might be required to talk to school groups or clean public areas.
- Offenders also need help when looking for accommodation and work.

9.2 IELTS Writing Task 2: fixed punishments

Some people believe that there should be fixed punishments for each type of crime. Others, however, argue that the circumstances of an individual crime, and the motivation for committing it, should always be taken into account when deciding on the punishment. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Here is my suggested essay outline:

1. Introduction: topic + response

People have different views about whether punishments for crimes should be fixed. Although there are some advantages of fixed punishments, I believe that it is better to judge each crime individually.

2. Benefits of fixed punishments

There are some good arguments for having one set punishment for each crime.

IDEAS: easy, fair justice system; everyone is aware of the punishment for each crime; fixed punishments could deter criminals.

3. Benefits of not having fixed punishments

However, I would argue that the circumstances of a crime and the criminal's motivation should have an influence on the punishment.

IDEAS: judge can decide the best response; a more humane system; example: stealing to feed a family compared to stealing for profit.

4. Conclusion: repeat your response

In conclusion, despite the advantages of fixed punishments, it seems to me that each crime should be judged taking both the circumstances and motivation into account.

10. full essay--environment (ebook--topic6 in page 22,23)

Usually I suggest writing 4 paragraphs for task 2. However, sometimes it might be better to write 5 paragraphs. The following essay question has three parts, so I've written three main body paragraphs (5 paragraphs in total).

Explain some of the ways in which humans are damaging the environment. What can governments do to address these problems? What can individual people do?

Humans are responsible for a variety of environmental problems, but we can also take steps to reduce the damage that we are causing to the planet. This essay will discuss environmental problems and the measures that governments and individuals can take to address these problems.

Two of the biggest threats to the environment are air pollution and waste. Gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from vehicles lead to global warming, which may have a devastating effect on the planet in the future. As the human population increases, we are also producing ever greater quantities of waste, which contaminates the earth and pollutes rivers and oceans.

Governments could certainly make more effort to reduce air pollution. They could introduce laws to limit emissions from factories or to force companies to use renewable energy from solar, wind or water power. They could also impose 'green taxes' on drivers and airline companies. In this way, people would be encouraged to use public transport and to take fewer flights abroad, therefore reducing emissions.

Individuals should also take responsibility for the impact they have on the environment. They can take public transport rather than driving, choose products with less packaging, and recycle as much as possible. Most supermarkets now provide reusable bags for shoppers as well as 'banks' for recycling glass, plastic and paper in their car parks. By reusing and recycling, we can help to reduce waste.

In conclusion, both national governments and individuals must play their part in looking after the environment.

Note: This essay is exactly 250 words long. I've tried to make it as simple as possible, but it's still good enough to get a band 9.

11. global language argument (ebook--topic15 in page 38)

Negatives of English as a global language:

The expansion of English has also been criticised. Some people worry that if one language, like English, becomes dominant, other languages may disappear. Languages spoken by small communities could become extinct as people learn English in order to find work. This would obviously have a negative effect on local cultures, customs and traditions because the new dominant language would bring its own culture with it. For example, the expansion of English has happened alongside the increasing popularity of American culture. The American film, music and fashion industries are as dominant as global American companies and products, such as Microsoft or the iPod. Some people call this 'cultural imperialism', meaning that one culture has power over others.

Try to analyse this paragraph

Is there a topic sentence? What reasons and examples are given? What linking expressions are used? What 'band 7 vocabulary' is used? Can you find some conditional sentences?

Write the main ideas for the 'global language' topic (positives and negatives) in your notebook.

12. IELTS Writing Task 2: using the ebook

A few people have asked me how to use the ebook. One way is to practise writing paragraphs using the ebook ideas.

Some ideas from the ebook about the benefits of mobile phones:

- The mobile phone is the most popular gadget in today's world.
- We can stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues wherever we are.
- Users can send text messages, surf the Internet, take photos and listen to music.
- Mobiles have also become fashion accessories.
- Mobile phones have revolutionised the way we communicate.

By linking these ideas (and adding a few things) I can write a paragraph:

The mobile phone has become the most popular gadget in today's world. The reason for this is that it is portable and versatile. Mobile phones are now carried at all times by most people, allowing us to stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues wherever we are. Furthermore, they now have many more functions than a standard telephone; mobile phone users can send text messages, surf the Internet, take photos and listen to music, as well as making calls. Mobiles have become fashion accessories, and they have revolutionised the way we communicate. (93 words)

13. IELTS writing Task 2: health topic (ebook--topic13 in page35,36)

Despite huge improvements in healthcare, the overall standard of physical health in many developed countries is now falling. What could be the reason for this trend, and what can be done to reverse it?

Here is a paragraph about causes of poor health:

Lifestyle is a major cause of poor health in developed countries. Most people now travel by car rather than walking, and machines now perform many traditional manual jobs. As a result, people tend to work in offices where little physical activity is required. At home, people are also less active; most adults relax by watching television, while children play video games rather than doing outdoor sports. Technology has therefore made our lives more comfortable but perhaps less healthy.

14. 'climate' topic

Some people prefer to live in hot climates, whereas others love the lifestyle in countries with cold climates. Discuss both views and explain which climate you prefer.

There are several benefits of living in a country with a hot climate. The main advantage is that people can enjoy being outside in the sun and doing outdoor activities. For example, residents of hot countries can spend their time sunbathing, swimming in the sea and eating in the open air. Another benefit of warm weather is that it is cheap and easier to buy clothes and wearing less clothing gives you a feeling of freedom. Also, many elderly people choose to move to hotter climates for health reasons and to avoid difficult winter conditions.

I looked at this question with one of my classes. We decided to write 2 main body paragraphs: **one about the benefits of hot climates, and one about the benefits of cold climates.**

15. 'bottled water' topic

Water is a natural resource that should always be free. Governments should ban the sale of bottled water. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here are some opinions that you could use:

1. Some people believe that bottled water is healthier than tap water.
2. They also argue that it tastes better.
3. Other people believe that we should consume less bottled water.
4. Plastic water bottles add to litter and waste problems.
5. Companies should not be able to make a profit from a natural resource.
6. There is no difference in quality between bottled and tap water.
7. Governments should ensure that everyone has access to clean tap water.

16. 'online shopping' topic (Wednesday, December 22, 2010)

Online shopping is increasing dramatically. How could this trend affect our environment and the kinds of jobs required?

My advice is to plan your essay with a 4-paragraph structure:

1. Introduction: topic + response (2 sentences are enough)

Introduce the topic of 'online shopping becoming more popular'. Then write that it will have a significant impact on the environment and on jobs.

2. Paragraph about the environment

Write about simple ideas e.g. people will drive less, so there will be less pollution, less destruction from the building of new roads, but perhaps more packaging.

3. Paragraph about jobs

Simple ideas e.g. many shop workers will lose their jobs, unemployment may rise, but there will be more skilled jobs in IT (computer programmers, web designers).

4. Conclusion: repeat your response

Overall opinion: online shopping may have a negative effect on employment, but it might be a good thing for the environment.

17. IELTS Writing: to what extent do you agree?

A good way to answer this question is: *To a certain extent I agree that...*

However, I also think that...

Example question: People visiting other countries should adapt to the customs and behaviours expected there. They should not expect the host country to welcome different customs and behaviours. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

My introduction: To a certain extent I agree that visitors to other countries should respect the culture of the host country. However, I also think that host countries should accept visitors' cultural differences.

By saying that you agree to a certain extent (not completely), you can now talk about both sides of the argument.

18. IELTS Writing Task 2: introductions (Wednesday, February 09, 2011)

Here are some example introductions for 3 different types of essay.

My technique is to write 2 sentences:

1. A sentence to introduce the topic
2. A sentence giving a general response to the question or instruction

Problem & Solution Essay:

It is true that children's behaviour seems to be getting worse. There are various reasons for this, and both schools and parents need to work together to improve the situation.

Discussion (& Opinion) Essay:

People have different views about how children should be taught. While there are some good arguments in favour of teaching children to be competitive, I believe that it is better to encourage co-operation.

Opinion (Agree / Disagree) Essay:

In recent years it has become more common for women to return to work after having a child. However, I do not agree that this has been the cause of problems for young people.

My advice: Keep your introduction short. Main body paragraphs are more important.

19.1 IELTS Writing Task 2: technology

Some ideas: Technology could increase the gap between rich and poor. Rich people have smart phones, laptops, wireless broadband Internet etc. People in developed countries can now work from home or from anywhere in the world. They can do their shopping online and have things delivered to their homes. Technology improves their quality of life.

On the other hand, many people in poorer countries, who did not have normal telephones, now have mobile phones. Also, the Internet is spreading to all parts of the world. In the past, only people in developed countries had access to world-class libraries, but now the Internet gives everyone access to the same information. This will lead to greater equality.

19.2 'technology' topic

Early technological developments helped ordinary people and changed their lives more than recent developments. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Many early technologies helped people and changed the way we live. The invention of printing, for example, had a huge impact on the way we communicate knowledge and information, the printing press allowed books and newspapers to be produced quickly and in large number, which meant that information became accessible to many more people. The telephone was another early technology that revolutionised communication, allowing people to speak together from different locations. Finally, technological breakthroughs led to new forms of transport, such as cars, trains and planes, which have completely changed the way we travel and trade goods.

19.3 'technology' essay

It is true that new technologies have had an influence on communication between people. Technology has affected relationships in various ways, and in my opinion there are both positive and negative effects.

Technology has had an impact on relationships in business, education and social life. **Firstly**, telephones and the Internet allow business people in different countries to interact without ever meeting each other. **Secondly**, services like Skype create new possibilities for relationships between students and teachers. For example, a student can now take video lessons with a teacher in a different city or country. **Finally**, many people use social networks, like Facebook, to make new friends and find people who share common interests, and they interact through their computers rather than face to face.

On the one hand, these developments can be extremely positive. Cooperation between people in different countries was much more difficult when communication was limited to written letters or telegrams. Nowadays, interactions by email, phone or video are almost as good as face-to-face meetings, and many of us benefit from these interactions, either in work or social contexts. **On the other hand**, the availability of new communication technologies can also have the result of isolating people and discouraging real interaction. For example, many young people choose to make friends online rather than mixing with their peers in the real world, and these 'virtual' relationships are a poor substitute for real friendships.

In conclusion, technology has certainly revolutionised communication between people, but not all of the outcomes of this revolution have been positive. (257 words, band 9)

19.4 firstly, secondly, finally (Wednesday, March 07, 2012)

A few people have asked me whether using "firstly, secondly, finally" to organise a paragraph is too **easy**.

My answer is that using easy organising language like "firstly, secondly, finally" allows you to focus on the **real content** of what you are writing - topic vocabulary, collocations, examples. This is what the examiner wants to see. You can get a band 9 using "firstly, secondly, finally" if the ideas between these linking words are good.

Some people believe that the range of technology available to individuals today is increasing the gap between rich people and poor people, while others say that technology has the opposite effect. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

I'd write a 4-paragraph essay:

1. Introduction: introduce the topic and give your view

2. One view

3. The other view (that you agree with)

4. Conclusion: repeat your view

Here's the plan that I wrote with my students:

1. **Introduction:** we disagree because we think that early and recent technologies have had an equally significant impact on our lives.

2. **Paragraph** about how early technologies helped people.

3. **Paragraph** about how recent technologies help people.

4. **Conclusion:** repeat the significance of both.

Several people have asked me about this question from Cambridge IELTS 8.

Nowadays the way many people interact with each other has changed because of technology.

In what ways has technology affected the types of relationships that people make? Has this been a positive or negative development?

Some simple alternatives to "firstly, secondly, finally" could be:

1. The main reason why I believe... is... / Another argument is... / Also,...

2. One problem is that... / Furthermore,... / Another drawback is that...

3. From a business perspective,... / In terms of education,... / From a social point of view,...

20. 'robots' topic (Wednesday, February 16, 2011)

Positive effects of robots:

- do manual jobs quickly eg. factory, packing
- cheap labour, more productive, no breaks (jobs that are boring, difficult for people)
- create free/extra time for people to spend doing what they want→make life easier,improve our quality of life

Negative effects of robots:

- become dependent on robots. We will lose skills eg. cooking, less human interaction, lazy→health problems
- unemployment will rise. People will be replaced by machines eg. self-service checkouts in supermarket eg. factory robots = fewer workers
- lead to bigger problems eg. poverty, crime etc...

Some people believe that robots will play an important role in future societies, while others argue that robots might have negative effects on society. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

21. 'women and work' topic (Wednesday, March 02, 2011)

Women should have an equal role alongside men in both police and armed forces. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here is my plan for a 4-paragraph essay: (ebook topic8-gender in page27)

1. Introduction: topic + response

- Introduce the topic e.g. "Increasing numbers of women are choosing to..."
- Respond to the question e.g. "I completely agree that women should be able..."

2. First reason why I agree: equal opportunities

Explain why women should have the same right as men to choose their profession. People should be chosen for jobs according to their skills, qualifications, character etc.

3. Second reason why I agree: women's capabilities

I would disagree with the view that women are less able than men to do certain jobs. Also, I would argue that policewomen, for example, may be better at controlling a situation by communicating more effectively. Police and military work requires more than just physical strength. Teamwork, leadership and communication can be much more important.

4. Conclusion: one sentence Repeat your response in a different way.

22. 'minority languages' essay (Wednesday, March 09, 2011)

It is true that some minority languages may disappear in the near future. Although it can be argued that governments could save money by allowing this to happen, I believe that these languages should be protected and preserved.

There are several reasons why saving minority languages could be seen as a waste of money. Firstly, if a language is only spoken by a small number of people, expensive education programmes will be needed to make sure that more people learn it, and the state will have to pay for facilities, teachers and marketing. This money might be better spent on other public services. Secondly, it would be much cheaper and more efficient for countries to have just one language. Governments could cut all kinds of costs related to communicating with each minority group.

Despite the above arguments, I believe that governments should try to preserve languages that are less widely spoken. A language is much more than simply a means of communication; it has a vital connection with the cultural identity of the people who speak it. If a language disappears, a whole way of life will disappear with it, and we will lose the rich cultural diversity that makes societies more interesting. By spending money to protect minority languages, governments can also preserve traditions, customs and behaviours that are part of a country's history.

In conclusion, it may save money in the short term if we allow minority languages to disappear, but in the long term this would have an extremely negative impact on our cultural heritage. (258 words)

Today, I'd like to share a 'band 9' sample essay for the question below.

Several languages are in danger of extinction because they are spoken by very small numbers of people. Some people say that governments should spend public money on saving these languages, while others believe that would be a waste of money. Discuss both these views and give your opinion.

(ebook topic15-language in page38)

23. 'job satisfaction' topic (Wednesday, April 13, 2011)

As most people spend a major part of their adult life at work, job satisfaction is an important element of individual well-being.

What factors contribute to job satisfaction?

How realistic is the expectation of job satisfaction for all workers?

The following paragraph answers the second part of the question (How realistic..)

It is difficult to imagine a world in which everyone is truly satisfied with their job. Most people work in order to earn a salary, and they would probably not choose to spend eight or more hours each day doing their jobs if they did not need the money. The need to earn money to pay mortgages, bills and everyday living costs is of much greater concern than job satisfaction. In fact, I would argue that the majority of people dislike their jobs and are unhappy about their salaries, working hours, workloads, or their bosses. (95 words)

Note: What "band 7 vocabulary" can you find in the paragraph above?

Usually the question tells you to "discuss both views" or it asks whether you "agree or disagree". However, sometimes the question looks different:

Competitiveness is considered to be a positive quality among people.

How does competitiveness affect individuals? Is competitiveness a positive or negative quality?

The following question doesn't seem to be one of the 3 normal types (opinion, discussion, problem/solution).

Happiness is considered very important in life.

Why is it difficult to define? What factors are important in achieving happiness?

I call this a "2 part" question, and it's easier than you think. Just answer the first question in paragraph 2, and the second question in paragraph 3:

24. IELTS Writing Task 2: the 'two-part' question

Notice that the question above gives you the topic (competitiveness) and then two questions. I call this a "two-part" question.

For this kind of question, just write 4 paragraphs (see below), and make sure you write an equal amount for paragraphs 2 and 3.

1. Introduction: topic + general response
2. Answer the first question
3. Answer the second question
4. Conclusion: repeat your response

25. the '2 part' question (Wednesday, July 13, 2011)

1. Introduction - topic + simple answer to both questions

2. Paragraph - explain why happiness is difficult to define

Some ideas: Explain that happiness means different things to different people; the same situation can make one person happy but another person sad/bored etc. Give examples of what makes different people happy (money, success, family, friends, hobbies). Give an example from your experience e.g. a hobby that makes you happy but that your friend hates.

3. Paragraph - give your opinions about how to achieve happiness

Some ideas: Try to organise your ideas logically - you could begin with humans' basic needs (in order to be happy we need to be healthy and have somewhere to live, food to eat etc.) then talk about the importance of family and friends. You could then write about career, money, success, status etc. - maybe you could explain that these things mean nothing if we do not have family and friends to share our experiences with. Give an example from your own life - what will make you happier than you are now?

4. Conclusion - repeat/summarise the main ideas

26. how to write introductions (Wednesday, April 06, 2011)

Here is a review of my advice for task 2 introductions:

1. Make the introduction short and do it quickly. The main body paragraphs are more important.
2. Two sentences are enough: 1) introduce the topic. 2) give a basic answer to the question.

Example question: *All high school students should be encouraged to take part in community service programmes. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

My introduction: Some people believe that high school students would benefit from doing unpaid work in their local communities. I completely agree that community service programmes for teenagers are a good idea.

27. strong or balanced opinion (Wednesday, March 30, 2011)

Governments should not have to provide care or financial support for elderly people because it is the responsibility of each person to prepare for retirement and support him or herself.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?

Introduction (strong opinion): People have different views about whether or not governments should help senior citizens. I completely disagree with the idea that elderly people should receive no support from the state.

Introduction (more balanced opinion): People have different views about whether or not governments should help senior citizens. Although I accept that we all have a responsibility to save money for retirement, I disagree with the idea that elderly people should receive no support from the state.

The following question asks for your opinion. You can either have a strong opinion or a more balanced opinion, but make it clear in your introduction.

Note: After the first introduction, try to write 2 paragraphs that both explain why you disagree. The second introduction allows you to discuss both sides (which might be easier).

28. sample discussion essay (Wednesday, April 20, 2011)

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are some benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. Many young people want to start earning money as soon as possible. In this way, they can become independent, and they will be able to afford their own house or start a family. In terms of their career, young people who decide to find work, rather than continue their studies, may progress more quickly. They will have the chance to gain real experience and learn practical skills related to their chosen profession. This may lead to promotions and a successful career.

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies. Firstly, academic qualifications are required in many professions. For example, it is impossible to become a doctor, teacher or lawyer without having the relevant degree. As a result, university graduates have access to more and better job opportunities, and they tend to earn higher salaries than those with fewer qualifications. Secondly, the job market is becoming increasingly competitive, and sometimes there are hundreds of applicants for one position in a company. Young people who do not have qualifications from a university or college will not be able to compete.

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their careers if they continue their studies beyond school level. (271 words, band 9)

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Here's an example of how I write a 4-paragraph essay for "discuss and give your opinion" questions. Notice that I give my opinion in 3 places (introduction, paragraph 3, conclusion).

29. how to write a paragraph (Wednesday, April 27, 2011)

Ideas: why should the ownership of guns be limited/controlled?

1. Topic sentence to introduce the idea of gun control
2. risk of accidents, danger to children
3. more violent crimes, criminals will use guns, police will need guns
4. higher suicide rates
5. guns create violent societies

Here's my paragraph using the ideas above. I've divided the paragraph into separate sentences so that you can see what I have done more clearly.

1. In many countries, gun ownership is strictly controlled.
2. Supporters of this policy point out the risk of accidents with guns, especially when children can gain access to them.
3. They also argue that the number of violent crimes increases when guns are available, and that police are forced to use guns to combat armed criminals.
4. Furthermore, suicide rates have been shown to rise in places where guns are legal.
5. All in all, gun control advocates believe that guns create violent societies with high murder rates.

Today I'm going to write a paragraph about gun control. I'll start with some vocabulary ideas, then I'll make them into full sentences.

Of course, in the IELTS exam you would probably have to explain the opposite view: the arguments in favour of gun ownership.

30.1 'museums' essay (Wednesday, May 04, 2011)

People have different views about the role and function of museums. In my opinion, museums can and should be both entertaining and educational.

On the one hand, it can be argued that the main role of a museum is to entertain. Museums are tourist attractions, and their aim is to exhibit a collection of interesting objects that many people will want to see. The average visitor may become bored if he or she has to read or listen to too much educational content, so museums often put more of an emphasis on enjoyment rather than learning. This type of museum is designed to be visually spectacular, and may have interactive activities or even games as part of its exhibitions.

On the other hand, some people argue that museums should focus on education. The aim of any exhibition should be to teach visitors something that they did not previously know. Usually this means that the history behind the museum's exhibits needs to be explained, and this can be done in various ways. Some museums employ professional guides to talk to their visitors, while other museums offer headsets so that visitors can listen to detailed commentary about the exhibition. In this way, museums can play an important role in teaching people about history, culture, science and many other aspects of life.

In conclusion, it seems to me that a good museum should be able to offer an interesting, enjoyable and educational experience so that people can have fun and learn something at the same time. (253 words, band 9)

30.2 use related words (Wednesday, May 11, 2011)

Museums: exhibition, exhibit (verb, like 'show'), an exhibit (noun, 'item'), artifact, object, collection, history, science, art, culture, visitors, members of the public, public viewing...

Entertain: entertainment, entertaining, enjoy, enjoyment, enjoyable, have fun, interesting, fascinating, spectacular, impressive, leisure time, free time, a day out, tourist attraction...

Educate: education, educational, teach, learn, explain, understand, know, gain/expand/pass on/transmit knowledge, skills, experience, open your mind, broaden your horizons...

31. idea, explain, example (Wednesday, May 18, 2011)

A sense of competition is necessary for success in life, and should therefore be encouraged. Competition motivates children to get good grades at school or become better at sports, while adults compete to climb the career ladder. In a job interview, for example, candidates compete to show that they are the most qualified, hard-working and competent person for the post.

32. 'helping poor countries' topic (Wednesday, June 08, 2011)

1. Introduction: introduce the topic of helping poor countries, and agree that giving money is not the best way to help.
2. Paragraph explaining why giving money is a bad idea.
3. Paragraph explaining why other types of help are better.
4. Conclusion: repeat the argument (investing is better than giving).

We discussed some ideas and wrote paragraph 2 together: In my opinion, it is a bad idea to simply give financial aid to governments of poor countries. If rich countries do this, there is a risk that the money will not go to the people who need it most. Governments may misuse the money they are given because they do not have the resources or the know-how to tackle the causes of poverty. In some cases, corrupt politicians have become rich while their citizens continue to suffer. For these reasons, it is important for developed countries to find ways to invest in developing nations, instead of just donating money.

Some people think that museums should be enjoyable places to entertain people, while others believe that the purpose of museums is to educate.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Look again at last week's question. Let's forget about the whole question. Just try to list some words that are related to the 3 main ideas.

Making lists of related words is a good way to generate ideas. You might not have time to do this in the exam, but it's a useful study technique.

A good way to write main body paragraphs is this:

Start with an idea; Explain it in detail; Give an example

Here's an example of how I 'build' a paragraph using the above method.

The money given to help poor countries does not solve the problem of poverty, so rich countries should give other types of help instead.

To what extent do you agree or disagree? (ebook topic10-Global issues in page29)

My students and I planned a 4-paragraph essay:

33. 'dependence' question (Wednesday, March 23, 2011)

Some people think that in the modern world we have become more dependent on each other, while others think that people are now more independent.

Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

First view: we have become more dependent

1. Life is more difficult and expensive, and we are less self-sufficient
2. Young people rely on their parents for longer
3. Unemployed people receive state benefits
4. Our jobs are much more specialised, and we need to work in teams

Second view: we are more independent

1. We rely on machines more than we depend on each other
2. The Internet allows us to solve problems without needing help
3. Families are more dispersed, and therefore provide less support
4. Education gives us the freedom to make our own choices

By linking these points together and supporting them with examples, you could easily write two good paragraphs.

34. 'gender and university' topic (Wednesday, June 15, 2011)

I did a lesson about this question with my students. Here are our ideas:

1. Introduction: We decided to completely disagree with the question statement. You don't need to explain both sides of the argument. Just give your opinion in the introduction, then support it in the main body paragraphs.
2. Paragraph 2: One reason why we decided to disagree is that it would not be practical or realistic to have exactly the same number of males and females on every course. Some courses have mainly male applicants, while others are more popular with females.
3. Paragraph 3: Another reason we disagreed is that it would not be fair to base admission to courses on gender. Universities should select candidates based on their qualifications, skills, experience etc.
4. Conclusion: Repeat the idea that selecting according to gender is not the best way to ensure equal opportunities for men and women at university.

Here's my full essay using last week's plan:

In my opinion, men and women should have the same educational opportunities. However, I do not agree with the idea of accepting equal proportions of each gender in every university subject.

Having the same number of men and women on all degree courses is simply unrealistic. Student numbers on any course depend on the applications that the institution receives. If a university decided to fill courses with equal numbers of males and females, it would need enough applicants of each gender. In reality, many courses are more popular with one gender than the other, and it would not be practical to aim for equal proportions. For example, nursing courses tend to attract more female applicants, and it would be difficult to fill these courses if fifty per cent of the places needed to go to males.

Apart from the practical concerns expressed above, I also believe that it would be unfair to base admission to university courses on gender. Universities should continue to select the best candidates for each course according to their qualifications. In this way, both men and women have the same opportunities, and applicants know that they will be successful if they work hard to achieve good grades at school. If a female student is the best candidate for a place on a course, it would be wrong to reject her in favour of a male student with lower grades or fewer qualifications.

In conclusion, the selection of university students should be based on merit, and it would be both impractical and unfair to change to a selection procedure based on gender. (265 words, band 9)

A few people have asked me about this question from Cambridge IELTS 5:

Universities should accept equal numbers of male and female students in every subject. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

35. how to answer any question (Wednesday, June 29, 2011)

Here are my thinking steps:

1. I read the question very carefully, maybe three times. I ask myself "What's the topic? What is the question asking me to write about?"
2. I underline the key things that must be included in the essay. I always answer every part of the question.
3. Now I think about my 4 paragraph structure. I can write any type of essay in 4 paragraphs; I just need to decide what to put in each paragraph.
4. If I need to give my opinion, I think "What is the easiest opinion to explain? What good vocabulary could I use?"
5. Then I write down some vocabulary ideas that are related to the topic.
6. I try to write 2 sentences for the introduction: I introduce the topic, then give a simple answer (including my opinion if the question asks for it).
7. I write short 'topic sentences' to start each paragraph, then develop my ideas by explaining and supporting with examples.
8. I look at the question from time to time in order to check that I'm answering every part of it.
9. I know that I write about 10 words per line; I can quickly check the approximate number of words that I've written.
10. If I need more words (to reach 250), I expand one of my examples in the main body paragraphs. If necessary, I draw an arrow to show where I want to add the extra words.

36. university graduates (Wednesday, July 20, 2011)

My students and I planned a 4-paragraph essay:

- 1) Introduction: introduce the topic and respond to both parts of the question. We decided to agree that graduates deserve good salaries, but we disagree with the idea that they should pay the full cost of their degree courses.
- 2) Paragraph explaining why graduates should earn good salaries: they have invested time and effort into gaining their qualifications; they have knowledge, skills and training required for important jobs; they are an asset to society.
- 3) Paragraph explaining why graduates should not have to pay the full cost of education: this will be too expensive and will deter many young people from going to university; students will have huge debts; graduates contribute by paying taxes when they work.
- 4) Conclusion: repeat the two main ideas.

37. globalisation of culture (Wednesday, July 27, 2011)

Here's my outline for a 4-paragraph essay:

Introduction

It is true that many aspects of culture are becoming increasingly similar throughout the world. Although this trend has some benefits, I would argue that there are more drawbacks.

First sentence of paragraph 2

On the one hand, the globalisation of fashion, brands, eating habits and other areas of culture has some benefits. (Explain the benefits)

First sentence of paragraph 3

On the other hand, I believe that the disadvantages of cultural globalisation are even more significant. (Explain the disadvantages)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems to me that the drawbacks of globalisation, in terms of cultural habits such as the clothes we wear or the foods we eat, do outweigh the benefits.

Today I want to show you what happens in my brain when I see any IELTS Writing Task 2 question.

It is right that university graduates should earn more money than less well educated people, but they should pay the full cost of their education. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Differences between countries become less evident each year. Nowadays, all over the world people share the same fashions, advertising, brands, eating habits and TV channels. Do the disadvantages of this trend outweigh the advantages?

38. IELTS Writing Task 2: method (Wednesday, August 10, 2011)

I've noticed that the more essay practice I do with my students, the more **defined** my writing method becomes.

For example, I now know that my 250-word essays usually contain 13 to 15 sentences: 2 for the introduction, 5 to 6 for each main paragraph and 1 sentence for the conclusion. It takes me 10 minutes to write a good plan, 5 minutes to write an introduction, I have 2 main ways of writing main paragraphs etc. etc. The question is: Do you have a clearly defined method? Do you repeatedly practise writing essays in the same way? If you don't have a method, it's just "hit and hope".

39. different introductions (Wednesday, August 17, 2011)

Some people think the main purpose of schools is to turn children into good citizens and workers, rather than to benefit them as individuals.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Here are 3 different introductions. Notice that the opinion is clear in each one.

Agree:

People have different views about what the main purpose of schools should be. Personally, I agree that a school's role is to prepare children to be productive members of society.

Disagree:

Many people argue that the main role of schools is to prepare children for their future jobs. However, I believe that the purpose of education should be to help children to grow as individuals.

Balanced view:

To a certain extent I agree that the role of schools is to prepare children to be productive members of society. However, I also believe that the education process has a positive impact on us as individuals.

40. one view or both views? (Wednesday, August 24, 2011)

This is the most common question that students ask me:

For "agree or disagree" questions, do I have to discuss both sides, or should I just support one side of the argument?

The answer is: it's your decision. If you completely agree, you don't need to mention the opposite view - just support your side of the argument. If you partly agree, you should write something about both sides.

Look at [last week's lesson](#). After the first two introductions, I would not give the other point of view, but after the last introduction I would mention both sides.

41. have a strong opinion (Wednesday, September 07, 2011)

If the question asks whether you agree or disagree, it's often easier to have a strong opinion (completely agree or completely disagree) rather than trying to be "in the middle". Here's an example question:

Families who do not send their children to public schools should not be required to pay taxes that support universal education. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

I don't think there is a "middle answer" to this question: either you think that the parents should not pay tax (agree), or you think they should pay tax (disagree).

When you have a strong opinion, you don't need to mention the opposite view.

Here's my plan for a 4-paragraph essay:

1. Introduction: 1 sentence to introduce the topic, 1 sentence to make your opinion clear (e.g. I completely disagree...)
2. Main paragraph: support your opinion with a reason
3. Main paragraph: support your opinion with another reason
4. Conclusion: repeat/summarise your opinion

42. balanced opinion (Wednesday, September 14, 2011)

In the last century, the first man to walk on the moon said it was "a giant leap for mankind". However, some people think it has made little difference to our daily lives. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

For this question, I would write that "I partly agree" or that "I agree to some extent". Then I would write one main paragraph about each side of the argument:

1. Introduction: I partly agree. Make it clear that you have a balanced opinion.
2. One side: In practical terms, sending a man to the moon has not changed most people's lives. We have not benefited in terms of our standard of living, health etc. In fact, governments have wasted a lot of money that could have been spent on public services.
3. Other side: On the other hand, putting a man on the moon was a huge achievement that still inspires and interests people today. It showed us that we can achieve anything we put our minds to.
4. Conclusion: The fact that man has walked on the moon might not have had a direct effect on our daily lives, but it was an inspiring achievement.

Last week I said that it's often easier to have a strong opinion and only support one side of the argument. Today I'm going to contradict myself! Let's look at a 'balanced opinion' essay.

43. do the advantages outweigh...? (Wednesday, September 21, 2011)

My advice for these questions is to write a paragraph about each side, and make it clear in the introduction and conclusion which side outweighs the other (i.e. your opinion about whether there are more advantages or disadvantages).

In some countries, governments are encouraging industries and businesses to move to regional areas outside the big cities. Do the advantages of this trend outweigh the disadvantages?

1. Introduce the topic by paraphrasing the statement, then give a clear opinion about whether there are more advantages or disadvantages.
2. Advantages - e.g. costs are lower in regional areas; there is more space; provide jobs to boost deprived areas; avoid further overcrowding in cities.
3. Disadvantages - e.g. greater availability of skilled workers in big cities; better transport and infrastructure; companies based in regional areas are further from their clients, providers and other contacts.
4. Conclude by summarising your opinion in a different way.

Some IELTS writing task 2 questions ask: "Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?" or "Do the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?"

Here are some ideas.

44. problem and solution (obesity) (Wednesday, September 28, 2011)

Childhood obesity is becoming a serious problem in many countries. Explain the main causes and effects of this problem, and suggest some possible solutions.

Here are some more ideas for this topic:

Causes:

- Eat junk food e.g. hamburgers, chips, McDonald's / drink sugary soft drink
- Lack of exercise / physical activity contributes to the obesity problem
- Play computer games / chat on the Internet, rather than playing outside or doing sport

Effects:

- These problems lead to obesity / children are overweight, unhealthy, unfit
- A higher risk of diseases e.g. Diabetes, heart disease, cancer
- Put a strain on hospitals / they will be a burden on hospitals in the future

Solutions:

- It is the parents'/schools'/government's responsibility to...
- Give children healthy food / control what they eat / ensure that they have a healthy diet / limit junk food advertising
- Restrict the time they spend playing computer games / encourage them to take regular exercise

45. Five sentence paragraphs (Saturday, October 08, 2011)

For example:

1. Topic sentence (e.g. There are several reasons why I believe...)
2. First reason
3. Example
4. Second reason
5. Third reason

example paragraph (ebook topic18 in page41,42)

Here's a 5-sentence paragraph using the second plan

1. Many people believe that sports professionals earn too much money.
2. They argue that sport is a form of entertainment rather than a vital public service.
3. We could easily live without sportspeople, yet other professionals who contribute much more to society are undervalued and underpaid.
4. For example, football players can earn enormous salaries by simply kicking a ball, while doctors, nurses and teachers earn a fraction of the money despite being essential for our health and prosperity.
5. From this perspective, sports stars do not deserve the salaries they currently earn.

46. higher education (Wednesday, October 19, 2011)

Introduction

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are some benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

Paragraph 1: benefits of getting a job

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. (IDEAS: start earning money, become independent, gain experience, learn skills, get promotions, settle down earlier, afford a house, have a family)

Paragraph 2: benefits of higher education (my opinion)

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies. (IDEAS: some jobs require academic qualifications, better job opportunities, higher salaries, the job market is very competitive, gain knowledge, become a useful member of society)

Conclusion

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their lives if they continue their studies beyond school level.

47. conclusions (Wednesday, November 23, 2011)

Several people have asked me about conclusions for IELTS Writing Task 2. The main body paragraphs are much more important, so don't worry too much about the conclusion; make it short, simple and fast.

Here are some example conclusion phrases for different types of question:

1. Opinion

For the reasons mentioned above, I believe that... (+ repeat your opinion).

2. Discussion (+ Opinion)

In conclusion, there are convincing arguments both for and against... (topic), but I believe that... (if the question asks for your opinion).

3. Advantages and Disadvantages

In conclusion, I would argue that the benefits of... (topic) outweigh the drawbacks.

4. Problem and Solution

In conclusion, it is clear that there are various reasons for... (topic), and steps need to be taken to tackle this problem.

When writing main body paragraphs for IELTS writing task 2, try to aim for five sentences.

Before you start writing it's a good idea to make some notes. Try to organise your notes according to this 5-sentence paragraph structure.

Another example:

1. Topic sentence (e.g. Many people believe that...)
2. Explain why
3. Explain in more detail
4. Example
5. Explain why they disagree with the opposite view

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Here's my full introduction and conclusion, as well as some ideas for the main body paragraphs:

48. difficult questions--'equality' topic (Wednesday, October 26, 2011)

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the relationship between equality and personal achievement. Some people believe that individuals can achieve more in egalitarian societies. Others believe that high levels of personal achievement are possible only if individuals are free to succeed or fail according to their individual merits.

What is your view of the relationship between equality and personal success?

In my opinion, an egalitarian society is one in which everyone has the same rights and the same opportunities. I completely agree that people can achieve more in this kind of society.

Education is an important factor with regard to personal success in life. I believe that all children should have access to free schooling, and higher education should be either free or affordable for all those who chose to pursue a university degree. In a society without free schooling or affordable higher education, only children and young adults from wealthier families would have access to the best learning opportunities, and they would therefore be better prepared for the job market. This kind of inequality would ensure the success of some but harm the prospects of others.

I would argue that equal rights and opportunities are not in conflict with people's freedom to succeed or fail. In other words, equality does not mean that people lose their motivation to succeed, or that they are not allowed to fail. On the contrary, I believe that most people would feel more motivated to work hard and reach their potential if they thought that they lived in a fair society. Those who did not make the same effort would know that they had wasted their opportunity. Inequality, on the other hand, would be more likely to demotivate people because they would know that the odds of success were stacked in favour of those from privileged backgrounds.

In conclusion, it seems to me that there is a positive relationship between equality and personal success. (260 words)

Note: 'egalitarian' refers to the principle that people are equal, and deserve equal rights and opportunities.

Faced with this question, here are 3 tips:

1. Have a strong opinion(e.g. I completely agree that people can achieve more in egalitarian societies.) You can ignore the other view.

2. Focus on the last line of the question(What is your view of...?). This line sums up the whole question very clearly. Just answer this question.

3. Use examples as the basis of your argument e.g. free university education ensures equality of opportunity, and therefore allows individuals to achieve more.

Note: I'm not sure that this was a 'real' IELTS question (maybe the student who sent it to me remembered it wrongly) because it is a bit confusing: it seems strange to me to imply that "egalitarian/equality" is the opposite of "free to succeed or fail". Anyway, I hope you still find the essay useful.

49. plan your main paragraphs (Wednesday, November 09, 2011)

Before you start writing your task 2 essay, you need a plan:

1. First, think about how you could write 2 main body paragraphs. What would be the main idea/topic of each one?
2. Then make some notes for the first main paragraph. Your notes could follow this formula: Idea, Explain, Example.
3. Do the same thing for the second main paragraph.

Here's an example question with a few ideas below:

People nowadays work hard to buy more things. This has made our lives generally more comfortable, but many traditional values and customs have been lost and this is a pity.

To what extent do you agree or disagree?

1. I can see two clear ideas in this question: 1) buying things has made our lives more comfortable. 2) traditional values and customs have been lost. I agree with both of these points, so I'll write one paragraph explaining why I agree with the first point, and another paragraph explaining the second point.
2. Idea:buying things has made life more comfortable. Explain/Examples: we buy appliances like microwave ovens and dishwashers; we use computers to shop online; more people own a car.
3. Idea:traditional values and customs have been lost. Explain/Examples: people buy microwave meals rather than cooking traditional dishes; traditional local shops disappear and are replaced with online shopping; people are more independent, but lack a sense of community.

50.1 discussion without opinion (Wednesday, November 16, 2011)

Remember: if the question doesn't ask for your opinion, don't give it.

Compare the 2 essays attached below. They are almost the same, but in the first essay I give my opinion clearly in several places, while in the second essay I've removed my opinions completely.

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are benefits to getting a job straight after school, I would argue that it is better to go to college or university.

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. Many young people want to start earning money as soon as possible. In this way, they can become independent, and they will be able to afford their own house or start a family. In terms of their career, young people who decide to find work, rather than continue their studies, may progress more quickly. They will have the chance to gain real experience and learn practical skills related to their chosen profession. This may lead to promotions and a successful career.

On the other hand, I believe that it is more beneficial for students to continue their studies. Firstly, academic qualifications are required in many professions. For example, it is impossible to become a doctor, teacher or lawyer without having the relevant degree. As a result, university graduates have access to more and better job opportunities, and they tend to earn higher salaries than those with fewer qualifications. Secondly, the job market is becoming increasingly competitive, and sometimes there are hundreds of applicants for one position in a company. Young people who do not have qualifications from a university or college will not be able to compete.

For the reasons mentioned above, it seems to me that students are more likely to be successful in their careers if they continue their studies beyond school level.

Some people believe that studying at university or college is the best route to a successful career, while others believe that it is better to get a job straight after school. Discuss both views.

When they finish school, teenagers face the dilemma of whether to get a job or continue their education. While there are benefits to getting a job straight after school, there are also good reasons why it might be beneficial to go to college or university.

The option to start work straight after school is attractive for several reasons. Many young people want to start earning money as soon as possible. In this way, they can become independent, and they will be able to afford their own house or start a family. In terms of their career, young people who decide to find work, rather than continue their studies, may progress more quickly. They will have the chance to gain real experience and learn practical skills related to their chosen profession. This may lead to promotions and a successful career.

On the other hand, it is also understandable that many students choose to continue their studies. Firstly, academic qualifications are required in many professions. For example, it is impossible to become a doctor, teacher or lawyer without having the relevant degree. As a result, university graduates have access to more and better job opportunities, and they tend to earn higher salaries than those with fewer qualifications. Secondly, the job market is becoming increasingly competitive,

and sometimes there are hundreds of applicants for one position in a company. Young people who do not have qualifications from a university or college may not be able to compete.

In conclusion, there are convincing arguments for starting work straight after school, but higher education can also lead to a successful career.

50.2 introduction without opinion (Wednesday, June 06, 2012)

Here are two example questions:

1. Many people believe that an effective public transport system is a key component of a modern city. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of public transport.
2. Crime rates tend to be higher in cities than in smaller towns. Explain some possible reasons for this problem, and suggest some solutions.

Here are two sample introductions:

1. Officials in many cities are keen to develop efficient public transport systems. While public transport has many benefits, there are also some drawbacks which are worth considering.
2. Cities generally experience higher levels of criminality than towns or villages. There are various reasons for this, but measures could be taken to tackle the problem.

Most discussion essays also ask for your opinion. Sometimes, however, the question doesn't ask for your opinion. It might just ask you to discuss two different views, or compare the advantages and disadvantages.

My normal advice for task 2 introductions is this: write two sentences - one to introduce the essay topic, and one to give a basic answer to the question. But what should you put in the second sentence (basic answer) if the question doesn't ask for your opinion?

Hopefully you can see that it's quite easy to write an introduction for these types of question. The approach is the same (topic + basic answer) whether the question asks for your opinion or not.

51. who should we help? (Wednesday, November 30, 2011)

We cannot help everyone in the world that needs help, so we should only be concerned with our own communities and countries.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Some people believe that we should not help people in other countries as long as there are problems in our own society. I disagree with this view because I believe that we should try to help as many people as possible.

On the one hand, I accept that it is important to help our neighbours and fellow citizens. In most communities there are people who are impoverished or disadvantaged in some way. It is possible to find homeless people, for example, in even the wealthiest of cities, and for those who are concerned about this problem, there are usually opportunities to volunteer time or give money to support these people. In the UK, people can help in a variety of ways, from donating clothing to serving free food in a soup kitchen. As the problems are on our doorstep, and there are obvious ways to help, I can understand why some people feel that we should prioritise local charity.

At the same time, I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders. In some countries the problems that people face are much more serious than those in our own communities, and it is often even easier to help. For example, when children are dying from curable diseases in African countries, governments and individuals in richer countries can save lives simply by paying for vaccines that already exist. A small donation to an international charity might have a much greater impact than helping in our local area.

In conclusion, it is true that we cannot help everyone, but in my opinion national boundaries should not stop us from helping those who are in need.

52. 'global warming' topic (Wednesday, December 14, 2011)

Here is a paragraph explaining the problem (causes) of global warming:

Perhaps the most serious problem facing the environment is global warming. Gases such as carbon dioxide trap heat from the sun within the earth's atmosphere, and this causes global temperatures to rise. This process is known as the greenhouse effect, and human activity is a major factor in the rise of the greenhouse gases which cause it. For example, factories and vehicles produce emissions and exhaust fumes. As many developing countries are becoming industrialised, emissions from factories are expected to increase. Furthermore, the number of cars on our streets is growing all the time, and cheap air travel is making flying accessible to more and more people. Consequently, the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere shows no signs of decreasing.

53. short introductions (Wednesday, December 21, 2011)

In many cities, security measures, such as the use of video cameras in public places, are being increased in order to reduce crime, but some people believe that these measures restrict our individual freedom.

Do the benefits of increased security outweigh the drawbacks?

Here's my short, fast introduction:

It is true that the security in many cities has been tightened in recent years. Although I agree that some security measures can feel restrictive, I believe that there are more benefits than drawbacks.

Note: - In reality, it might not be true that security has been increased in most cities, but I think we have to accept this in order to answer the question.

- The question gives us an example of increased security (video cameras), so we can definitely use that example in a paragraph about the drawbacks.

- Notice that my introduction paraphrases the question. I've used some of the words from the question, but there are some nice changes too (e.g. tightened, feel restrictive).

Let's plan an essay for this question.

1. Introduction- I don't think there is a "middle" opinion for this question. You either agree that we should **only** be worried about our own communities and countries, or you think that we should **also** help those outside our own countries. The best response might be to **disagree** - then you can say that we should try to help everyone.

2. Paragraph 2- I agree that it is important to help our neighbours and fellow citizens. (Explain this idea)

3. Paragraph 3- At the same time, I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders. (Explain)

4. Conclusion- Repeat the idea that we can help people both at home and abroad. (280 words, band 9)

If the question asks you to explain a problem related to the environment, you could write about global warming.

You can learn a lot from this paragraph if you analyse it:

1. How many sentences are there? What does each sentence do? (e.g. The first sentence introduces the topic)

2. Can you find some "band 7 vocabulary"?

3. Look at how the ideas are linked. Can you see that the word "this" is an important linking word?

It's a good idea to practise writing short, fast introductions. If you can write the introduction quickly, you will have more time to focus on the main paragraphs - these are the key to a high score.