

1. the same language & 'special' language

The language for the following 4 types of chart is **the same**: Line graphs, Bar charts, Pie charts, Tables. **These 4 types of chart all show the same thing: numbers**. So what type of language are you going to use? You need to be able to **1) describe numbers 2) compare different numbers 3) describe changes in numbers (increase, decrease etc.)**. Easy!

Only one type of question requires 'special' language: **the process diagram**. A process diagram shows steps or stages, not numbers.

There are four stages in the process, beginning with **the collection of information about the weather**. This information is **then analysed, prepared for presentation**, and finally **broadcast to the public**.

Looking at the first and second stages of the process, there are **three ways of collecting weather data and three ways of analysing it**. Firstly, **incoming information** can be received by satellite and presented for analysis as a satellite photo. The same data can also be passed to a radar station and presented on a radar screen or synoptic chart. Secondly, incoming information may be collected directly by radar and analysed on a radar screen or synoptic chart. Finally, **drifting buoys** also receive data which can be shown on a synoptic chart.

At the third stage of the process, the weather broadcast is prepared on computers. Finally, it is delivered to the public on television, on the radio, or as a recorded telephone announcement.

2. Comparing numbers

In 1970, around 5 million people travelled to work by car each day, _____ about 4 million who used the bus _____ 2 million who commuted by train. Over the next 30 years there was a significant increase in the number of car users, to almost 7 million, _____ a steady rise in rail passengers, to 3 million. _____, the number of bus commuters decreased slightly.

3. Too many synonyms

I advise my students to keep it simple and avoid making mistakes. Just learn one or two different ways to write the same thing. For example:

shows = illustrates / compares graph = line graph
chart = bar chart / pie chart the number of = the figure for
increased = rose / saw an increase / there was a rise

4. The most important skill

It's useful to think about how to start your sentences. For example, here are some sentences about the year 1970:

- 1) **60 million tonnes of goods were transported by road.**
- 2) **The amount of goods** transported by road totalled 60 million tonnes.
- 3) **Road vehicles** were used to transport 60 million tonnes of goods.

You should notice that it's much easier to begin with the number (sentence 1). This is how I usually prefer to write sentences for task 1.

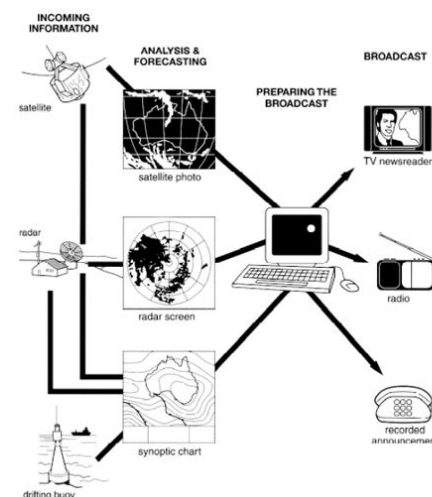
Number 2 is good, but you might find that you **repeat "the amount of goods" too many times if you only use this type of sentence**.

Number 3 is the most difficult. **You can't say "Road was used", so you have to add the word "vehicles". Most students make a mistake here.**

People sometimes ask me to teach them "the language for pie charts" or "the language for tables". I tell them that they already know it.

You can usually **take the same set of numbers and present them in either of these 4 ways**. The language you use to describe them will not change.

The figure illustrates the process used by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology to forecast the weather.



1. compared to (with)
2. and only (about / around)
3. and
4. By contrast (In contrast)

Some students learn 10 different ways to write the word "shows" (e.g. the graph shows). They find words like depicts, indicates, reveals, displays, exhibits etc. But **none of these words are really appropriate for the kind of essay we are writing**.

Probably the most important skill for task 1 is **to be able to describe numbers correctly**. Look at the table below.

Goods transported in UK (millions of tonnes)

Year	Road	Rail
1970	60	35
1980	65	38

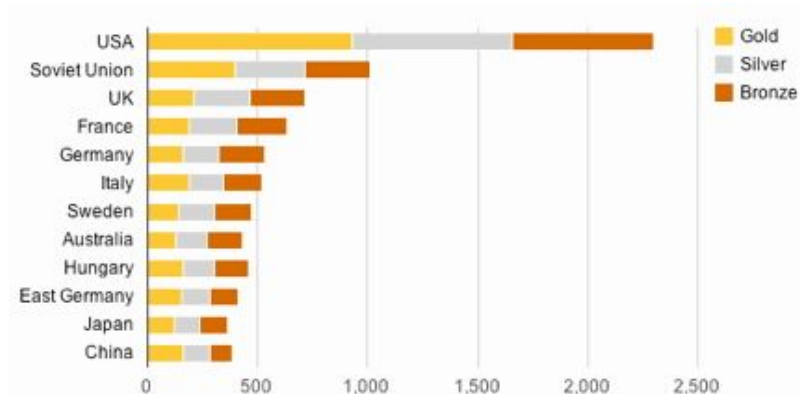
4. different introductions

The table below shows the proportion of different categories of families living in poverty in Australia in 1999.

- 1) The chart **compares** percentages of Australians **from** six different family **types** who were classed as poor in 1999.
- 2) The table **gives information about** poverty rates among six **types** of household in Australia in the year 1999.
- 3) The table **compares different categories** of Australian families **in terms of** the proportion of people **living below the poverty line** in each one.

5. language for comparing

The chart below shows the total number of Olympic medals won by twelve different countries.



The bar chart compares twelve countries in terms of the overall number of medals that they have won at the Olympic Games.

It is clear that the USA is by far the most successful Olympic medal winning nation. It is also noticeable that the figures for gold, silver and bronze medals won by any particular country tend to be fairly similar.

The USA has won a total of around 2,300 Olympic medals, including approximately 900 gold medals, 750 silver and 650 bronze. In second place on the all-time medals chart is the Soviet Union, with just over 1,000 medals. Again, the number of gold medals won by this country is slightly higher than the number of silver or bronze medals.

Only four other countries - the UK, France, Germany and Italy - have won more than 500 Olympic medals, all with similar proportions of each medal colour. Apart from the USA and the Soviet Union, China is the only other country with a noticeably higher proportion of gold medals (about 200) compared to silver and bronze (about 100 each). (178 words, band 9)

- ❖ The chart compares... in terms of the number of...
- ❖ ...is by far the most... OR ...has by far the highest number of...
- ❖ the figures for... tend to be fairly similar
- ❖ In second place on the chart is...*
- ❖ The number of... is slightly higher than...
- ❖ Only four other countries have...
- ❖ ...all with similar proportions of...
- ❖ ...is the only country with a noticeably higher proportion of...

***Note:** Only use phrases like "in second place" if the chart shows some kind of competition. Don't write "in first / second place" if the chart shows unemployment or health problems!

Have you ever tried writing several different introductions for the same question? (Cambridge IELTS 4, page 31)

Family type	Proportion of people from each household type living in poverty
single aged person	6% (54,000)
aged couple	4% (48,000)
single, no children	19% (359,000)
couple, no children	7% (211,000)
sole parent	21% (232,000)
couple with children	12% (933,000)
all households	11% (1,837,000)

each **stacked bar** shows us **4 pieces of information** (**number of gold, silver and bronze medals, and the total number**).

If you look carefully at the bar chart essay, you'll find some good phrases for comparing. See if you can adapt them to other task 1 questions.

6. the main features & the details

The table [compares](#) the percentages of people using different functions of their mobile phones between 2006 and 2010.

Throughout the period shown, the main reason why people used their mobile phones was to make calls. However, there was a marked increase in the popularity of other mobile phone features, particularly the Internet search feature.

In 2006, 100% of mobile phone owners used their phones to make calls, while the next most popular functions were text messaging (73%) and taking photos (66%). [By contrast](#), less than 20% of owners played games or music on their phones, and there were no figures for users doing Internet searches or recording video.

[Over the following 4 years](#), there was relatively little change in the figures for the top three mobile phone features. However, the percentage of people using their phones to access the Internet [jumped to](#) 41% in 2008 [and then to](#) 73% in 2010. There was also a significant rise in the use of mobiles to play games and to record video, with figures reaching 41% and 35% respectively in 2010.

7. line graph

two main points for your overview (summary) of the graph below.

The first thing you should notice is that the car was easily the most popular form of transport in each of the years shown on the graph. **Secondly**, you could contrast the rising trends for car and train use with the falling trend for bus users.

The line graph [compares figures for](#) daily travel by workers in the UK using three different forms of transport over a period of 60 years.

[It is clear that](#) the car is by far the most popular means of transport for UK commuters [throughout the period shown](#). Also, while the numbers of people who use the car and train increase gradually, the number of bus users falls steadily. (overview paragraph describing the two points above)

In 1970, around 5 million UK commuters travelled by car on a daily basis, while the bus and train were used by about 4 million and 2 million people respectively. In the year 2000, the number of those driving to work rose to 7 million and the number of commuting rail passengers reached 3 million. However, there was a small drop of approximately 0.5 million in the number of bus users.

By 2030, the number of people who commute by car is expected to reach almost 9 million, and the number of train users is also predicted to rise, to nearly 5 million. By contrast, buses are predicted to become a less popular choice, with only 3 million daily users.

'while' sentences

1) 'while' at the beginning of the sentence:

While the numbers of people who use the car and train increase gradually, the number of bus users falls steadily.

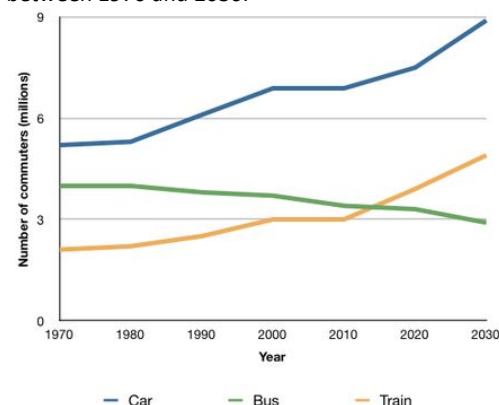
2) 'while' in the middle of the sentence:

In 1970, around 5 million UK commuters travelled by car on a daily basis, while the bus and train were used by about 4 million and 2 million people respectively.

Percentages of mobile phone owners using various mobile phone features

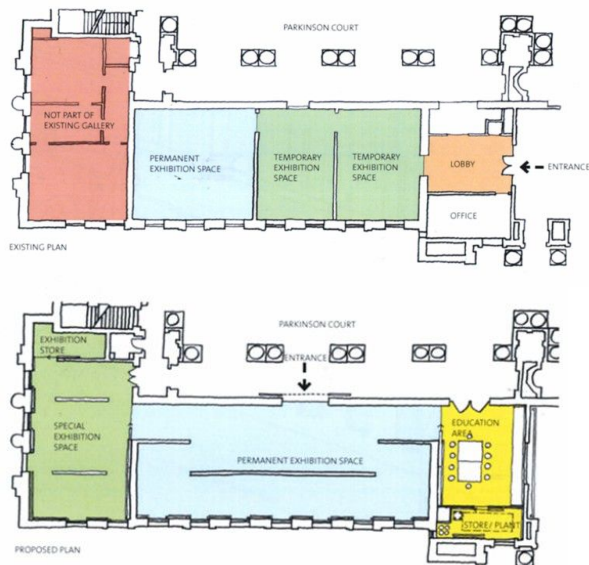
	2006	2008	2010
Make calls	100	100	99
Take photos	66	71	76
Send & receive text messages	73	75	79
Play games	17	42	41
Search the Internet	no data	41	73
Play music	12	18	26
Record video	no data	9	35

The graph below shows the average number of UK commuters travelling each day by car, bus or train between 1970 and 2030.



Tip: Don't look for particular years or numbers. Look at the overall trend over the whole 60-year period.

8. 'before and after' diagram



The diagrams below are existing and proposed floor plans for the redevelopment of an art gallery.

Here's my advice:

1. Introduction: paraphrase the question
2. Summary: the main changes to the gallery (entrance and use of space)
3. Paragraph comparing entrance, lobby, office, education area
4. Paragraph comparing use of space for exhibitions

The first picture shows the layout of an art gallery, and the second shows some proposed changes to the gallery space.

It is clear that significant changes will be made in terms of the use of floor space in the gallery. There will be a completely new entrance and more space for exhibitions.

At present, visitors enter the gallery through doors which lead into a lobby. However, the plan is to move the entrance to the Parkinson Court side of the building, and visitors will walk straight into the exhibition area. In place of the lobby and office areas, which are shown on the existing plan, the new gallery plan shows an education area and a small storage area.

The **permanent** exhibition space in the redeveloped gallery will be about twice as large as it is now because it will occupy the area that is now used for temporary exhibitions. There will also be a new room for special exhibitions. This room is shown in red on the existing plan and is not currently part of the gallery. (178 words, band 9)

9. maps of an island (Cambridge 9 Test1)

My introduction: The diagrams illustrate some changes to a small island which has been developed for tourism.

My overview: It is clear that the island has changed considerably with the introduction of tourism, and six new features can be seen in the second diagram. The main developments are that the island is accessible and visitors have somewhere to stay.

Looking at the maps in more detail, we can see that small huts have been built to accommodate visitors to the island. The other physical structures that have been added are a reception building, in the middle of the island, and a restaurant to the north of the reception. Before these developments, the island was completely bare apart from a few trees.

As well as the buildings mentioned above, the new facilities on the island include a pier, where boats can dock. There is also a short road linking the pier with the reception and restaurant, and footpaths connect the huts. Finally, there is a designated swimming area for tourists off a beach on the western tip of the island. (175 words, band 9)

Question: The two maps below show an island, before and after the construction of some tourist facilities.

1. Introduction: As usual, we can start the essay by paraphrasing the question (rewrite the question in your own words).

2. Overview: For our second paragraph we need to summarise the information in a couple of sentences. When comparing diagrams, we can count the number of changes and look for the main types of changes.

Here are some things that you might have noticed if you analysed it carefully:

Range of verb tenses, and use of both active and passive:

- has been developed, have been built
- has changed
- can be seen
- is, are, include
- was

IELTS Advice: small words can also impress

The three words would impress the examiner because **they fit the description perfectly**. As one person pointed out in a comment below that lesson, **most students would probably use the word 'hotel' to describe the accommodation for tourists shown on the map**. **Only a native speaker or an advanced learner of English** would know that **small buildings to accommodate tourists on an island would probably be called huts**.

It's the same with 'dock' and 'tip'. Not everyone would know that **the perfect verb to describe the parking of a boat is 'to dock'**. And not everyone would know that **tip is the perfect word for the end point of a landmass**.

10. rise or raise?

These two words are often confused by students. Here is the main difference:

1. something rises (e.g. **the price rose**)
2. somebody raises something (e.g. **the company raised the price**)
3. "Rise" (rose, risen) can be a verb or a noun. **use it for IELTS writing task 1:**
The price of cigarettes rises every year. (verb, present)
In 2008, the number of customers rose from 100 to 200. (verb, past)
There has been a dramatic rise in Internet usage in the UK. (noun)
In 2008, the UK saw a rise in the divorce rate. (noun)
4. "Raise" (raised) is almost always a verb. **probably won't use it for task 1:**
The Government raises the price of cigarettes every year.
Charities work to raise the standard of living in developing countries.

11. pie charts essay (Cambridge 8 Test2)

I always write 4 paragraphs:

1. Introduction-paraphrase the question
2. Overview-describe 2 main or general things
3. Details 4. Details

The pie charts **compare** the expenditure of a school in the UK in three different years over a 20-year period.

It is clear that teachers' salaries made up the largest proportion of the school's spending in all three years (1981, 1991 and 2001). **By contrast**, insurance was the smallest cost in each year.

In 1981, 40% of the school's budget went on teachers' salaries. This figure rose to 50% in 1991, but fell again by 5% in 2001. The proportion of spending on other workers' wages fell steadily over the 20-year period, from 28% of the budget in 1981 to only 15% in 2001.

Expenditure on insurance stood at only 2% of the total in 1981, but reached 8% in 2001. Finally, the percentages for resources and furniture/equipment fluctuated. The figure for resources was highest in 1991, at 20%, and the proportion of spending on furniture and equipment reached its peak in 2001, at 23%. (158 words, band 9)

12. the most common mistake

The most common mistake in IELTS writing task 1 is not a grammar mistake.

Find the 2 big mistakes in the sentences below: The unemployment rate in the UK rose by 2% between 2008 and 2009, whereas **Canada** decreased by about 1%. **The USA was the highest**, at just over 4%.

The big problem is: **you CAN'T write "Canada decreased" or "the USA was the highest"**. Canada didn't decrease! The unemployment rate decreased.

Here's an example corrected version:

The unemployment rate in the UK rose by 2% between 2008 and 2009, whereas **in Canada it** decreased by about 1%. **The USA saw the highest rise in unemployment, with an increase of** just over 4%.

Phrases and collocations that would impress the examiner:

- with the introduction of tourism
- new features
- main developments
- the island is accessible
- small huts*
- to accommodate visitors
- physical structures
- in the middle of, to the north of
- completely bare apart from
- where boats can dock*
- a designated swimming area
- the western tip* of the island
- *huts, dock and tip might be the words that most impress the examiner in this essay.

'details' paragraphs

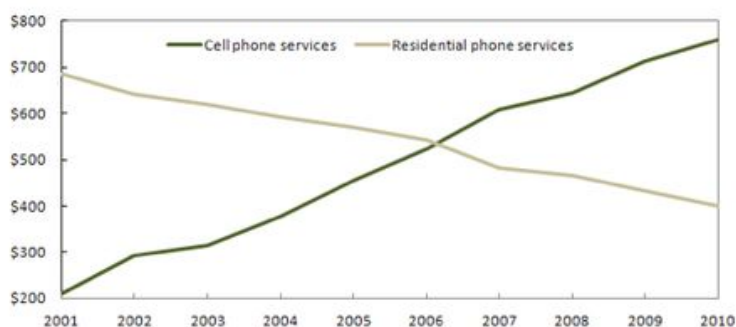
this encourages you to divide the information into 2 groups, and hopefully this means that your essay will be better organised and you'll make some useful comparisons.

Analysis: You can see that I chose to put the two types of salaries together in one paragraph, and the other three categories together in the second paragraph. There are other ways to divide the information, but this seemed the most obvious way to me.

11. line graph essay

The graph below shows US consumers' average annual expenditures on cell phone and residential phone services between 2001 and 2010.

Chart 1. Average annual expenditures on cell phone and residential phone services, 2001–2010



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey

The line graph **compares** average yearly spending by Americans on mobile and landline phone services from 2001 to 2010.

It is clear that spending on landline phones fell steadily over the 10-year period, while mobile phone expenditure rose quickly. The year 2006 marks the point at which expenditure on mobile services overtook that for residential phone services.

In 2001, US consumers spent an average of nearly \$700 on residential phone services, compared to only around \$200 on cell phone services. Over the following five years, average yearly spending on landlines dropped by nearly \$200. By contrast, expenditure on mobiles rose by approximately \$300.

In the year 2006, the average American paid out the same amount of money on both types of phone service, spending just over \$500 on each. By 2010, expenditure on mobile phones had reached around \$750, while the figure for spending on residential services had fallen to just over half this amount. (162 words, band 9)

12. charts showing countries

A few things to remember when the graph or chart shows countries:

If the question doesn't name the countries (e.g. "in three countries"), **you could name them in your introduction** (e.g. "in Britain, France and Germany"). You could even write **"in three countries, namely Britain, France and Germany"**.

Always compare the countries; **never describe the figures for each country in separate paragraphs**. Finally, try to vary the way you write about countries.

13. describing percentages

Here are 3 useful techniques for describing percentages:

English speakers usually **put the percentage at the start of the sentence**.

Use while, whereas or compared to (after a comma) to add a comparison.

Use "the figure for" to add another comparison in the next sentence.

Use these examples as models for your own sentences:

In 1999, **35%** of British people went abroad for their holidays, **while** only 28% of Australians spent their holidays in a different country. **The figure for** the USA stood at 31%.

Around **40%** of women in the UK had an undergraduate qualification in 1999, **compared to** 37% of men. **The figures for** the year 2000 rose slightly to 42% and 38% respectively.

Some **paraphrasing** that you could use in your introduction:

- annual expenditures = yearly spending
- cell phone services = mobile phones
- residential services = landline phones

Two possible main points for your overview / summary:

- compare the two trends over the whole period
- say what happened in 2006

Select key details:

- compare the figures for 2001
- describe the changes in expenditure over the following 5 years
- give the figures for 2006 (where the two lines meet)
- finish with a comparison of spending in 2010

repeating words

In the line graph essay I repeated the word "expenditure" four times. Is this a problem?

The answer is no! If you look at the graph, you can see that **the whole essay must be about expenditure**.

In fact, I needed to mention the idea of expenditure eleven times! Does the examiner really expect you to **think of eleven synonyms for "expenditure"**? Of course not. It's **impossible** to avoid repeating some of the key words in writing task 1.

Try to add variety where you can

(I also used "spending", "spent" and "paid out"), but don't become obsessed with this. The important thing is to describe and compare the data.

Don't forget the word **"the"** when writing about **"the USA"** and **"the UK"**.

For example:

The number of elderly people in the USA **rose**.

Canada also **saw a rise** in the number of elderly people.

However, **the figure for** Australia **fell**.

14. ways to prepare

1) Print a collection of questions

Try to get paper copies (printed) of around 10 different questions - it's useful to be able to see them all in one place. Your 'pack' of questions should include:

a line graph, bar chart, pie chart, table, 2 different charts, 3 or more similar charts, process diagram, comparison diagram, life cycle, map.

2) Practise parts of essays

Instead of writing a full essay, try writing 10 **introductions** - one for each of the questions in your 'pack' (see point 1 above). The next time you are studying, just focus on writing **overviews**.

3) Use 'model' sentences

Use my sentences as models, and simply change the content according to the topic.

15. life cycle diagram

The diagram shows the life cycle of the honey bee. Two things to consider are:

1. how to summarise the diagram before describing the stages in detail
2. whether to use active or passive verb forms

As I've explained before, we don't write a conclusion for task 1, we write an overview. You can put this at the end of your essay, but I prefer to put it straight after the introduction. Let's return to last week's life cycle question.

The diagram illustrates the various stages in the life of a honey bee. We can see that the complete life cycle lasts between 34 and 36 days. It is also noticeable that there are five main stages in the development of the honey bee, from egg to mature adult insect.

The life cycle of the honey bee begins when the female adult lays an egg; the female typically lays one or two eggs every 3 days. Between 9 and 10 days later, each egg hatches and the immature insect, or nymph, appears.

During the third stage of the life cycle, the **nymph** grows in size and sheds its skin three times. This moulting first takes place 5 days after the egg hatches, then 7 days later, and again another 9 days later. After a total of 30 to 31 days from the start of the cycle, the young adult honey bee emerges from its final moulting stage, and in the space of only 4 days it reaches full maturity.

15. using the passive

In which of the following sentences is the passive used appropriately? Which sentences should be changed to the active?

- 1) The number of marriages **was decreased** between 1999 and 2009.
- 2) First, the raw materials **are mixed** together.
- 3) The figure for residents with no children **has been increased** this year.
- 4) The final product **is packaged and delivered** to shops.

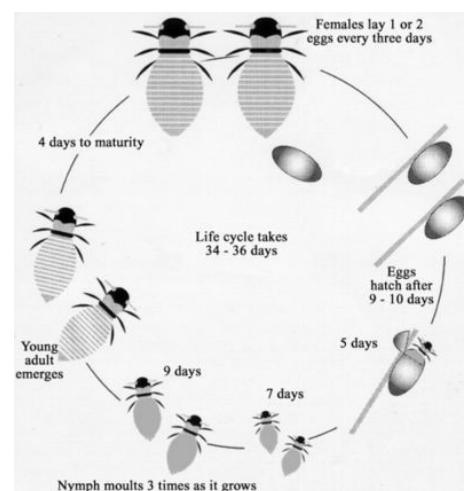
16. a real process description

For glass wool, the raw materials are sand, limestone and soda ash, as well as recycled off-cuts from the production process. The raw materials are melted in a furnace at very high temperatures, typically between 1,300°C to 1,500°C. The smoke created during this process is filtered and flue gases are cleaned to minimise any environmental impact. The droplets of melt exiting the furnace are spun into fibres. Small quantities of binding agents are added to the fibres. The mineral wool is then hardened in a curing oven at around 200°C. The mineral wool is cut to the required size and shape.

Task: Can you find the passive verbs in the paragraph above? Can you improve the paragraph by adding some sequencing words (firstly, then etc.)?

Before you start writing any task 1 essays, it's a good idea to have an overview of the different types of questions that you might face.

On a different day, practise describing percentages, or comparing numbers etc...



nymph = immature form of an insect
moul = shed or lose old feathers, hair or skin to allow for new growth

Note: I often separate the introduction and overview, but in this case I've put them together in the same paragraph. Both ways are fine.
(169 words, band 9)

1 and 3 need to be changed:

1. The number of marriages **decreased** between 1999 and 2009. (not 'was decreased')
3. The figure for residents with no children **has increased** this year. (not 'has been increased')

The passive is used correctly in sentences 2 and 4 because they describe steps in a process.

You might find it useful to read a real process description from [this website](#) about insulation manufacturing. The extract below looks very similar to a paragraph from an IELTS essay!

17. process diagrams (See Cambridge IELTS book 8 for the full question)

The following paragraph describes the process of making cement. At the first stage in the cement production process, limestone and clay are crushed to form a powder. This powder is then mixed and passed through a rotating heater. The resulting mixture is ground, and finally the end product, cement, is packed into large bags.

There are 2 things that make process descriptions special:

Phrases that order the process and link the steps (underlined)
Passive verbs (highlighted)

18. diagram overview

But how do you write an overview of a diagram that doesn't show numbers?

1) Here are some things you could put in a process diagram overview:

The total number of steps in the process.

Where the process begins and ends.

2) And this is what you could write about for a comparing diagram:

The total number of changes or differences.

The main changes or differences.

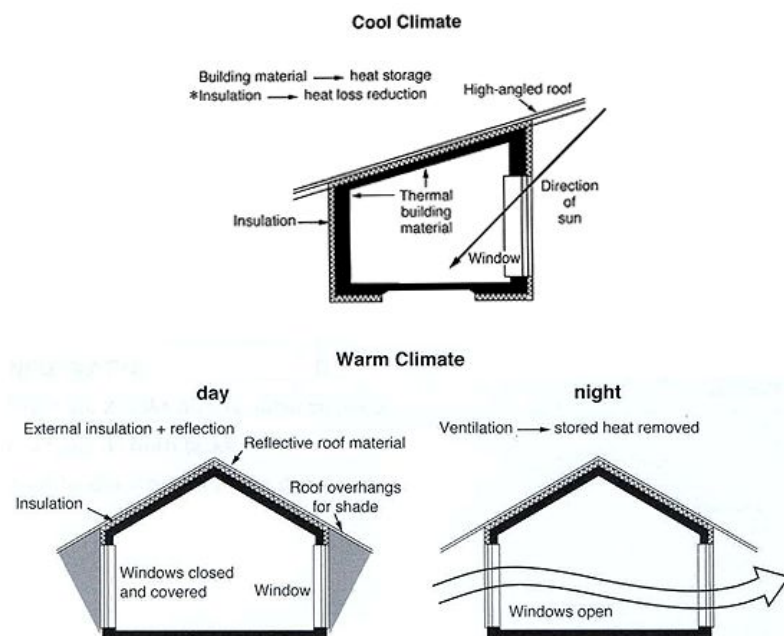
The main similarities or what doesn't change.

After the introduction, I tell my students to write an overview of the information shown on the chart. When the chart shows numbers, we look for the highest, lowest, biggest change, overall trend etc.

18. always the same method

The diagrams below show some principles of house design for cool and for warm climates.

Students worry about how to describe diagrams, but the basic method is always the same: introduction, summary of main points, specific details.



Although this question is different from the normal graph/chart questions, you should structure your answer in the same way. Try to write 4 paragraphs:

The diagrams show how house designs differ according to climate.

The most noticeable difference between houses designed for cool and warm climates is in the shape of the roof. The designs also differ with regard to the windows and the use of insulation.

We can see that the cool climate house has a high-angled roof, which allows sunlight to enter through the window. By contrast, the roof of the warm climate house has a peak in the middle and roof overhangs to shade the windows. Insulation and thermal building materials are used in cool climates to reduce heat loss, whereas insulation and reflective materials are used to keep the heat out in warm climates.

Finally, the cool climate house has one window which faces the direction of the sun, while the warm climate house has windows on two sides which are shaded from the sun. By opening the two windows at night, the house designed for warm climates can be ventilated. (162 words, band 9)

1. **Introduction:** paraphrase the question.

2. **Summary:** describe the main differences - the design of the roof and windows, and the use of insulation.

3. **Details:** compare the roof design and use of insulation.

4. **Details:** compare the window design and how windows are used during the day and at night.

19. graph with temperatures

The **climograph** below shows average monthly temperatures and rainfall in the city of Kolkata (or Calcutta).

The following easy questions should help you to notice some key features:

1. Do temperatures and rainfall vary (change) significantly over the year?
2. In which months are temperatures highest and lowest? (include figures)
3. On average, how much rain falls in the months of July and August?
4. What is noticeable about January and December?

Here are my answers:

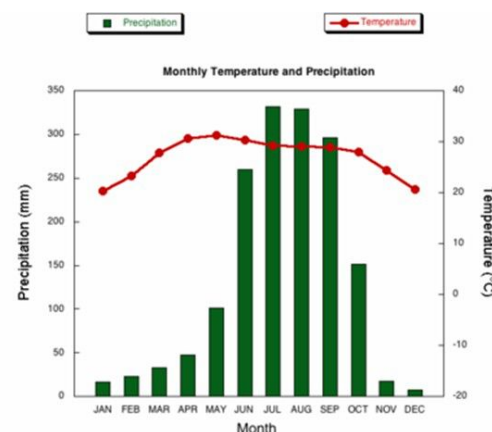
1. Monthly figures for precipitation in Kolkata vary considerably, but monthly temperatures remain relatively stable.
2. Temperatures are highest between April and June, at around 30°C, and lowest in December and January, at approximately 20°C.
3. Average rainfall reaches around 330mm in the months of July and August.
4. It is noticeable that Kolkata experiences both its lowest temperatures and its lowest rainfall in January and December.

The chart compares average figures for temperature and precipitation over the course of a calendar year in Kolkata.

It is noticeable that monthly figures for precipitation in Kolkata vary considerably, whereas monthly temperatures remain relatively stable. Rainfall is highest from July to August, while **temperatures are highest** in April and May.

Between the months of January and May, average temperatures in Kolkata rise from their lowest point at around 20°C to a peak of just over 30°C. Average rainfall in the city also rises over the same period, from approximately 20mm of rain in January to 100mm in May.

While temperatures stay roughly the same for the next four months, the amount of rainfall more than doubles between May and June. Figures for precipitation remain above 250mm from June to September, peaking at around 330mm in July. The final three months of the year see a dramatic fall in precipitation, to a low of about 10mm in December, and a steady drop in temperatures back to the January average. (173 words, band 9)



Note: the verbs used above are in the present simple (vary, remain, are, reaches, experiences) because the graph shows average figures, not particular years.

'highest' or 'the highest'?

We use "the" when there is a noun after the adjective e.g. the highest number, the highest proportion.

When we put the noun before, we don't need "the" e.g. the number was highest, the proportion was highest.

So, compare these 2 sentences:

- The UK had **the highest** rate of unemployment.
- The unemployment rate was **highest** in the UK.

19.1 double, twice as, twofold

1. 'double' (verb)

The number of unemployed people doubled between 2005 and 2009.

2. 'twice as...as/compared to', 'three times as...as/compared to'

There were twice as many unemployed people in 2009 as in 2005.

Twice as many people were unemployed in 2009 compared to 2005.

3. 'twofold', 'threefold' (adjective or adverb)

There was a twofold increase in the number of unemployed people between 2005 and 2009. (adjective with the noun 'increase')

The number of unemployed people increased twofold between 2005 and 2009. (adverb with the verb 'increase')

19.2 'to' or 'by'

Let's use these figures:

- Company profit in 2005 = £20,000
- Company profit in 2010 = £25,000

Now compare these sentences:

- Company profit rose **to** £25,000 in 2010.
- Company profit rose **by** £5,000 between 2005 and 2010.

A few students have asked me about how to use 'double', 'twice as', 'three times', 'twofold', 'threefold' etc. Compare how each word/phrase is used in the following examples:

Try using these forms in your own sentences. Make sure you follow the patterns.

In IELTS writing task 1, you might need to use verbs like increase, decrease, rise and fall. These verbs can be followed by the words 'to' and 'by', but what's the difference?

It's easy: 'to' is used before the new figure, and 'by' is used to show the change. It's the same when you are talking about a fall.

20.1 real statistics

The employment rate for those aged from 16 to 64 for the three months to June 2012 was 71.0 per cent. This is the highest figure since the three months to May 2009 and it is up 0.4 percentage points on the previous quarter. The number of people in employment aged 16 and over increased by 201,000 on the quarter to reach 29.48 million, the largest quarterly increase since the three months to July 2010. The number of people in employment was 96,000 lower than the pre-recession peak of 29.57 million recorded for March-May 2008.

20.2 nouns and verbs

When describing changes I prefer to avoid words like *soar*, *rocket* and *plummet* because they are too "sensationalist" - they exaggerate too much, and are more journalistic than academic in style. Instead, we can demonstrate good control of grammar by using words like **increase**, **rise** and **fall** as both nouns and verbs.

21. Bar chart

- Figure 1 shows that expenditure was highest in London (£552.30 per week), followed by the South East (£523.90), the East of England (£487.70) and the South West (£474.10)
- It also shows that spending was lowest among households in the North East (£387.20) and Yorkshire and The Humber (£400.70)
- In the West Midlands, East Midlands, Yorkshire and The Humber, and the South East, the largest household expenditure category was transport, ranging from £63.30 to £75.30 a week respectively. In the North East, Yorkshire and The Humber, North West, and the South West the largest household expenditure category was on recreation and culture, ranging from £51.20 to £63.20 per week respectively. In London the highest overall spend was on housing, fuel and power (£80.10)

ten sentences

- State what the chart shows.
- Make a general comparison between the South and the North.
- Contrast London with the North East (without giving the figures).
- Give the overall figure for England.
- Give the figure for London and compare it with the average for England.
- Add that figures for the South East, East and South West were also higher than the country average.
- Give approximate figures for the three regions above.
- Describe the similar figures for the West Midlands, North West and East Midlands.
- Give figures for the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber.
- Compare figures for the North East, national average and London.

repeating key words

Repeating a key word or phrase a few times is not a problem; sometimes it is necessary to show that you are consistently talking about the same thing. It's fine to either repeat the key words or make small changes. Look at these examples of small changes I made to the phrase **average weekly spending**:

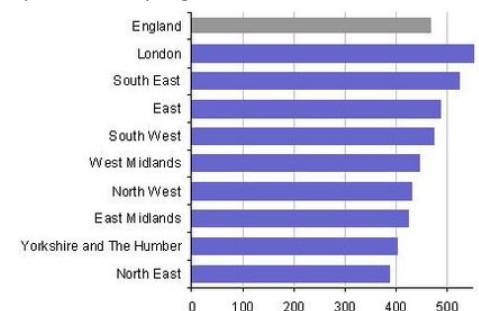
spent on average	average expenditure
weekly spending figures	levels of spending
spent per week	expenditure per week

A good place to find 'real' descriptions of graphs and charts is a government statistics website like [this one](#) for the UK. If you click on the different themes, you'll see graphs, charts and written summaries of recent statistics for the country.

Here's an example summary from the website

- London saw **a significant increase** in the cost of homes. (noun)
- The cost of homes in London **increased significantly**. (verb)
- There was **a rise** in house prices between 1990 and 1995. (noun)
- House prices **rose** between 1990 and 1995. (verb)
- There was **a 7% fall** in the average house price in Tokyo. (noun)
- The average Tokyo house price **fell** by 7%. (verb)

Average weekly household expenditure, by region, 2007-09



Weekly expenditure (£)

One way to practise for writing task 1 is to think in terms of sentences rather than worrying about the full essay. Just take a chart or graph and try to write 10 sentences about it.

If you try to use too much variety, there is a danger that you will confuse the reader or write something that does not mean what you want it to mean.

Here are my 10 sentences:

1. The bar chart shows average weekly spending by households in different areas of England between 2007 and 2009.
2. Households in the south of the country spent more on average than those in the north.
3. Average weekly spending by households was highest in London and lowest in the North East.
4. English households spent on average around £470 per week.
5. The average expenditure for households in London was about £560 per week, almost £100 more than the overall figure for England.
6. Households in the South East, East and South West also spent more than the national average.
7. Weekly household spending figures for those three regions were approximately £520, £490 and £480 respectively.
8. Similar levels of household spending were seen in the West Midlands, the North West and the East Midlands, at about £430 to £450 per week.
9. In the region of Yorkshire and the Humber, households spent approximately £400 per week, while expenditure in the North East was around £10 per week lower than this.
10. It is noticeable that average weekly expenditure by households in the North East was around £80 less than the national average, and around £170 less than the London average.

a common mistake

Students often make mistakes with thousands, millions and billions. It might seem strange, but you should say "10 million" not "10 millions". It's the same with hundred, thousand and billion. Try to avoid this mistake in writing task 1 - examiners notice it!

Correct: 10 million people

Wrong: 10 millions people, 10 millions of people, 10 million of people

Note:

When there is no number, we do write "millions of".

e.g. Millions of people travel abroad each year.

You have 20 minutes for task 1, so try spending 5 minutes on each paragraph. This might help you to organise your time better.

22. how to use your 20 minutes

1) First 5 minutes

Read the question, make sure you understand the chart, write your introduction by paraphrasing the question.

2) Second 5 minutes

Look at the chart and try to find 2 general points. Don't look at specific details; look for "the big picture". Write 2 sentences summarising the information.

3) Final 10 minutes

Describe specific details. Try to break this part into 2 paragraphs because it looks better. You could spend 5 minutes on each paragraph.

23. the overview

So what makes a good overview? Here are a few tips:

1. An overview is **simply a summary of the main things** you can see.
2. Because the overview is so important, I **recommend putting it at the beginning of your essay, just after the introduction sentence.**
3. I write **two overview sentences**. A one-sentence overview isn't really enough.
4. **Try not to include specific numbers in the overview.** Save the specifics for later paragraphs.
5. Look at the 'big picture' e.g. **the overall change** from the first year to the last year (if years are shown on the chart), **the differences** between whole categories rather than single numbers, or the total number of stages in a process.

A current examiner recently told me that the most common mistake in students' task 1 essays is that **there is no overview**. This was also true when I was an examiner.

My overview: Overall, car ownership in Britain increased between 1971 and 2007. In particular, the number of households with two cars rose, while the number of households without a car fell. (full essay in Page20)

Analysis:

1. Notice that I didn't include any specific numbers. Save the details for later.
2. The first sentence describes the "big picture". The first thing I did was look at **all 4 lines and the whole period**. I noticed that there was an overall trend towards people having more cars (the word 'ownership' came from the question). Most students tend to miss this kind of general observation.
3. The second sentence highlights the biggest changes over the whole period. With these 2 sentences, I've definitely summarised the main features of the graph.

24. bar charts with age groups

3 sentences about the first chart:

1. Compare the percentages for students under 26.
2. Mention the overall trend as students get older, and that the proportions are the same for the 40-49 age group.
3. Compare the percentages for students over 49.

3 sentences about the second chart:

1. Write about the two youngest age groups.
2. Write about the 30-39 age group.
3. Write about the two oldest age groups.

The bar charts compare students of different ages in terms of why they are studying and whether they are supported by an employer.

It is clear that the proportion of students who study for career purposes is far higher among the younger age groups, while the oldest students are more likely to study for interest. Employer support is more commonly given to younger students.

Around 80% of students aged under 26 study to further their careers, whereas only 10% study purely out of interest. The gap between these two proportions narrows as students get older, and the figures for those in their forties are the same, at about 40%. Students aged over 49 overwhelmingly study for interest (70%) rather than for professional reasons (less than 20%).

Just over 60% of students aged under 26 are supported by their employers. By contrast, the 30-39 age group is the most self-sufficient, with only 30% being given time off and help with fees. The figures rise slightly for students in their forties and for those aged 50 or more. (178 words, band 9)

ages and age groups

One person: He is 10 years old. / He is a 10-year-old. / He is aged 10.

More than one person: The children in the class are all 10 years old.

It is a class of 10-year-olds (or "10-year-old children").

The children in the class are all aged 10.

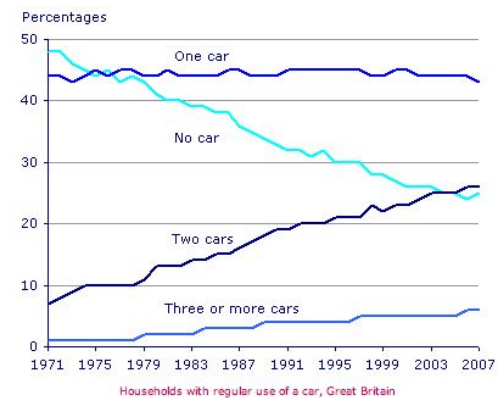
Age groups with more than one person:

The chart shows the preferred hobbies of children (who are) between 10 and 12 years old.

The chart shows the preferred hobbies of 10- to 12-year-olds (or "10- to 12-year-old children").

The chart shows the preferred hobbies of children aged 10 to 12.

Let's look at an example overview of the graph below.



choosing which details to include

I usually find that 3 sentences are enough for a good 'details' paragraph, which means that we only need to choose 3 things to describe for each chart.

Cambridge IELTS 5, test 2 (page 52)

The charts below show the main reasons for study among students of different age groups and the amount of support they received from employers.

As usual, I recommend writing 4 paragraphs:

1. A quick introduction to say what the charts show.
2. An overview of the main features - one sentence for each chart.
3. Describe the first chart in detail.
4. Describe the second chart in detail.

It's easy to make small mistakes when describing ages and age groups. Here are some examples that should help.

Note: If you miss the hyphens (-), it's not a big problem. It won't affect your score.

25. paraphrasing

Here are some simple changes you can make:

- graph = line graph
- chart = bar chart
- diagram = figure
- shows = illustrates (or 'compares' if the graph is comparing)
- proportion = percentage
- information = data
- the number of = the figure for
- the proportion of = the figure for
- people in the USA = Americans
- from 1999 to 2009 = between 1999 and 2009
- from 1999 to 2009 = over a period of 10 years
- how to produce = the process of producing
- in three countries=in the UK,France and Spain (i.e.name the countries)

26. IELTS Grammar: number, amount, proportion, figure

number

- Use "the number of + plural noun" e.g. the number of visitors.
- Don't use it to describe percentages or uncountable nouns e.g. ~~money~~.

amount

- Use "the amount of + uncountable noun" e.g. the amount of money.
- Don't use it with countable nouns e.g. the amount of ~~person/people~~.

proportion

- Only use this to describe percentages (not numbers).
- Use "the proportion of + plural noun" e.g. the proportion of people.

figure

- Use "the figure for + plural noun" e.g. the figure for visitors to the UK.
- Use it with uncountable nouns e.g. the figure for unemployment.
- Use it with countries e.g. the figure for Canada.
- Use it with percentages e.g. the figure (for...) rose to 10%.

27. why I'd start with task 1

Students often ask whether it's better to do task 1 or task 2 first.

In my opinion, **it's best to start any exam with something quick and easy that gives you confidence**. Hopefully you'll agree that the quickest and easiest part of the whole writing test is the introduction to task 1. You don't need to think too much about the introduction to task 1; **simply rewrite the question statement by changing a few words**.

28. more than one chart

Many students are still worried about questions with more than one chart.

Here are some tips:

- If there are 2 charts, they often show different information. Don't worry about comparing them. Just do: introduction, overview, then one paragraph for each chart.
- If the units are different (e.g. one chart shows 'millions' and the other shows 'percentages'), you can't usually compare them.
- If the units are the same, you can probably compare the charts.
- If there are 3 or 4 charts, you can usually compare them.

To see an essay about 2 different charts (Cambridge IELTS 6, p98).

To see an essay about 4 related charts (Cambridge IELTS 7, p101).

The easiest way to start your Task 1 essay is by **paraphrasing the question**. Paraphrasing means **writing something in a different way (using your own words)**.

Tip: "**The figure for / figures for**" is a great phrase that not many people use (e.g. the graph shows figures for unemployment in three countries).

Somebody asked me about the difference between these 4 words (for IELTS writing task 1). I'll try to explain some basic ways to use them.

Note: If you've read any of my task 1 essays, you'll see that I like "the figure for" because it can be used in almost any situation.

1. Introduction

Write one sentence, but introduce each chart separately e.g. "The first bar chart shows..., and the second chart illustrates..."

2. Summary of main points

Write 2 sentences. If the information in the charts is not connected, find one main point or general trend for each chart. If the charts are connected, try to make comparisons.

3. Main body paragraphs

If the 2 charts are completely different (e.g. a graph and a table), write a separate paragraph about each. If the charts are the same, and show the same information (e.g. 2 pie charts), don't describe them separately; the examiner will want to see comparisons. In this case, you could write one paragraph describing all of the information, but I still prefer to write 2 paragraphs because it makes the essay look more organised.

Cambridge IELTS 6, page 98

The charts below give information about USA marriage and divorce rates between 1970 and 2000, and the marital status of adult Americans in two of the years.

The first bar chart shows changes in the number of marriages and divorces in the USA, and the second chart shows figures for the marital status of American adults in 1970 and 2000.

It is clear that there was a fall in the number of marriages in the USA between 1970 and 2000. The majority of adult Americans were married in both years, but the proportion of single adults was higher in 2000.

In 1970, there were 2.5 million marriages in the USA and 1 million divorces. The marriage rate remained stable in 1980, but fell to 2 million by the year 2000. In contrast, the divorce rate peaked in 1980, at nearly 1.5 million divorces, before falling back to 1 million at the end of the period.

Around 70% of American adults were married in 1970, but this figure dropped to just under 60% by 2000. At the same time, the proportion of unmarried people and divorcees rose by about 10% in total. The proportion of widowed Americans was slightly lower in 2000. (174 words)

You might find it easier to introduce two different charts by writing two separate sentences.

Simple introduction: Paraphrase the question. Use "the first chart... the second chart"

Summary: Describe one main point about each chart (2 sentences)

First chart: Compare marriage and divorce rates. Mention 1970, 2000 and anything interesting in between (I mentioned 1980)

Second chart: Start by comparing the highest figures (married). I grouped 'never married' and 'divorced' together. Mention less important figures quickly (widowed)

(four pie charts essay) Cambridge IELTS book 7, page 101

The pie charts below show units of electricity production by fuel source in Australia and France in 1980 and 2000.

The pie charts compare the amount of electricity produced using five different sources of fuel in two countries over two separate years.

Total electricity production increased dramatically from 1980 to 2000 in both Australia and France. While the totals for both countries were similar, there were big differences in the fuel sources used.

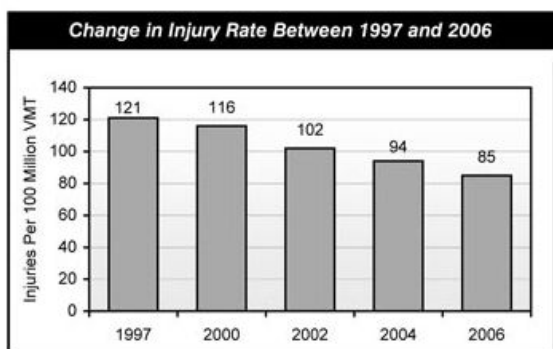
Coal was used to produce 50 of the total 100 units of electricity in Australia in 1980, rising to 130 out of 170 units in 2000. By contrast, nuclear power became the most important fuel source in France in 2000, producing almost 75% of the country's electricity.

Australia depended on hydro power for just under 25% of its electricity in both years, but the amount of electricity produced using this type of power fell from 5 to only 2 units in France. Oil, on the other hand, remained a relatively important fuel source in France, but its use declined in Australia. Both countries relied on natural gas for electricity production significantly more in 1980 than in 2000. (170 words)

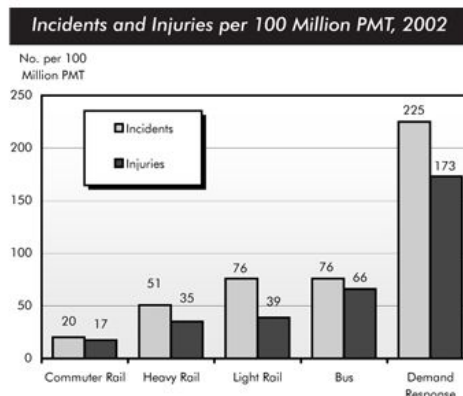
29. change or comparison?

While line graphs always show changes or trends (increase, decrease etc.), this is not always true for bar charts, pie charts and tables.

Here is a bar chart that does show 'change':



And here is a bar chart that shows 'comparison':



Can you see the difference? How will this difference affect what you write in your essay?

You seem to have the right idea:

1. Charts show 'change' when we see TIME (usually years) on the x axis.
2. Charts show 'comparison' when the x axis has different ITEMS rather than time. You can't talk about 'increase/decrease' for this type of chart.

30. IELTS Writing Task 1: bar chart without years

The important thing to remember about the second type is that you can't describe increases and decreases. Let's look at this type in more detail.

The chart below shows numbers of incidents and injuries per 100 million passenger miles travelled (PMT) by transportation type in 2002.

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

- **Introduction:** Explain what the chart shows by paraphrasing the question.
- **Overview:** Look for two main things - in this case, we could mention the highest item and the fact that there were more incidents than injuries for all five transport types. You don't need to mention any numbers at this point.
- **Details:** I'd probably group together the two highest items (demand response and bus) in this paragraph. Remember that you can't talk about an increase or decrease; you can only compare the numbers.
- **Details:** I'd group the three types of rail transport together for this paragraph. Write some nice comparison sentences!

The bar chart compares the number of incidents and injuries for every 100 million passenger miles travelled on five different types of public transport in 2002.

It is clear that the most incidents and injuries took place on demand-response vehicles. By contrast, commuter rail services recorded by far the lowest figures.

A total of 225 incidents and 173 injuries, per 100 million passenger miles travelled, took place on demand-response transport services. These figures were nearly three times as high as those for the second highest category, bus services. There were 76 incidents and 66 people were injured on buses.

Rail services experienced fewer problems. The number of incidents on light rail trains equalled the figure recorded for buses, but there were significantly fewer injuries, at only 39. Heavy rail services saw lower numbers of such events than light rail services, but commuter rail passengers were even less likely to experience problems. In fact, only 20 incidents and 17 injuries occurred on commuter trains. (165 words, band 9)

31. singular or plural?

So, the labels on a chart could be:

- single parent
- graduate
- only child
- laptop computer

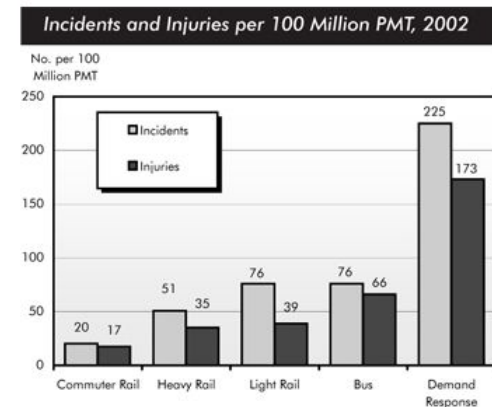
But when you write a sentence, you might need to use a plural:

- The number of single parents increased.
- In 1999 nearly 55% of graduates were female.
- The UK has the highest number of only children.
- More laptop computers were sold in the UK than any other country.

Don't just copy the words from the graph or chart. Think first about how to use them correctly.

Last week we saw that there are two types of bar chart:

1. those that show changes over time
2. those that compare different items



Note: You don't need to know what 'demand-response' transport is (it's an American term which I've never used).

Note: Don't worry about the repetition of "incidents and injuries" in this essay. There are no perfect synonyms for these words, although I managed to use "problems" and "such events" later in the essay. The most important thing is to describe the data clearly and make some good comparisons.

Students often make simple mistakes with singular and plural forms, especially in Writing Task 1. The problem is that **the words used on graphs, charts and tables are usually singular.**

32. table about waste

A few things to consider before you write your essay:

1. Can you think of a few alternative ways to write "waste production"?
2. What is the most noticeable feature of the table?
3. Is there a general trend over the period of time shown?
4. How can you separate the information into 2 groups (in order to write 2 paragraphs about specific details)?

Here are my answers to last week's questions:

1. It's fine to repeat the word 'waste' because there isn't really an ideal synonym ('rubbish' and 'garbage' have a more limited meaning). However, we can vary our sentences by writing things like 'waste output', 'waste materials' or 'the waste that was produced'.
2. The most noticeable feature must be that the US produced by far the most waste in all 3 years. Use this idea in your 'overview' paragraph.
3. The general trend is that waste production rose in every country apart from Korea. This could be your second 'overview' idea.
4. I would write one main paragraph comparing the 3 countries with the highest figures (US, Japan, Korea), and a separate paragraph about Ireland, Poland and Portugal. Try to use some 'comparing' language when describing the countries (e.g. while, whereas, by contrast) and some 'trend' language when describing the years (e.g. increased, rose, fell).

Missing words: risen, created, recorded, is, produced (x2), managed, given, had (x2), stood, were, increased

The US, Japan and Korea _____ by far the most waste. In 1980, the US _____ 131 million tonnes of waste, while the figure for Japan _____ at 28 million tonnes. No figure _____ for Korea in 1980, but in 1990, 31 million tonnes of waste _____ in that country. By 2000, waste production in the USA _____ to 192 million tonnes, while Japan's figure _____ to 53 million tonnes. However, Korea _____ to reduce its output to 19 million tonnes. Ireland, Poland and Portugal only _____ a total of around 30 million tonnes of waste between them, adding the figures for all three years together.

Note: The above description is not a full essay.

Can you find the mistakes in the paragraph below?

In 1980, the US produced 131 millions of tonnes of waste. Japan was in second place with 28 millions, while the figures for Poland, Portugal and Ireland were less than 5 millions. In 1990, the US was 151, and in 2000 it rose to 192 millions.

Mistakes:

1. When there is a number we say "131 million tonnes". Only use "millions of tonnes" when there is no number.
2. Don't write "in first/second place". It's not a competition!
3. Don't write "the US was + number"

So, here's my corrected paragraph:

In 1980, the US produced 131 million tonnes of waste. Japan produced the second largest amount, with 28 million tonnes, while the figures for Poland, Portugal and Ireland were less than 5 million. In 1990, the US created 151 million tonnes of waste, and in 2000 this rose to 192 million tonnes.

The table below shows **the amount of waste production** (in millions of tonnes) **in six different countries in three different years over a twenty-year period.**

	1980	1990	2000
Ireland	0.6	*	5
Japan	28	32	53
Korea	*	31	19
Poland	4	5	6.6
Portugal	2	3	5
US	131	151	192

*Figure not available

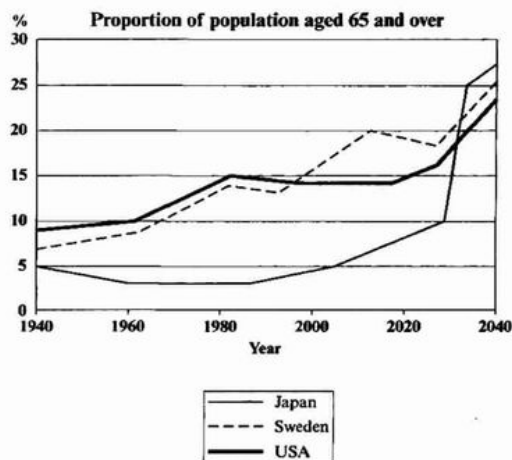
I've missed out the verbs in the following description. Choose them from the list to fill the gaps. For some of the gaps, more than one verb is possible.

produced (or created)
created (or produced); stood
is given
were recorded
had increased (or risen)
had risen (or increased)
managed
produced (or created)

Note: Some of the mistakes are not related to grammar.

33. IELTS Writing Task 1: graph showing future years

Cambridge IELTS book 5 (page 29). The graph below shows the proportion of the population aged 65 and over between 1940 and 2040 in three different countries.



Here are the steps I would follow to write my essay:

- Introduction: write one sentence to introduce what the graph shows. Just paraphrase the question statement (i.e. change a few words).
- Summary: describe 2 main things e.g. the overall trend for all 3 countries, and the biggest change that you can see.
- Details: compare all 3 countries in 1940, then in 1990.
- Details: describe the dramatic increase predicted for Japan, and compare all 3 countries in 2040.

Note: Try writing some essay plans like the one above. Planning makes you think about selecting and organising, so it's a useful skill to practise (even if you don't do a plan in your exam).

The line graph compares the percentage of people aged 65 or more in three countries over a period of 100 years.

It is clear that the proportion of elderly people increases in each country between 1940 and 2040. Japan is expected to see the most dramatic changes in its elderly population.

In 1940, around 9% of Americans were aged 65 or over, compared to about 7% of Swedish people and 5% of Japanese people. The proportions of elderly people in the USA and Sweden rose gradually over the next 50 years, reaching just under 15% in 1990. By contrast, the figures for Japan remained below 5% until the early 2000s.

Looking into the future, a sudden increase in the percentage of elderly people is predicted for Japan, with a jump of over 15% in just 10 years from 2030 to 2040. By 2040, it is thought that around 27% of the Japanese population will be 65 years old or more, while the figures for Sweden and the USA will be slightly lower, at about 25% and 23% respectively.

(178 words, band 9)

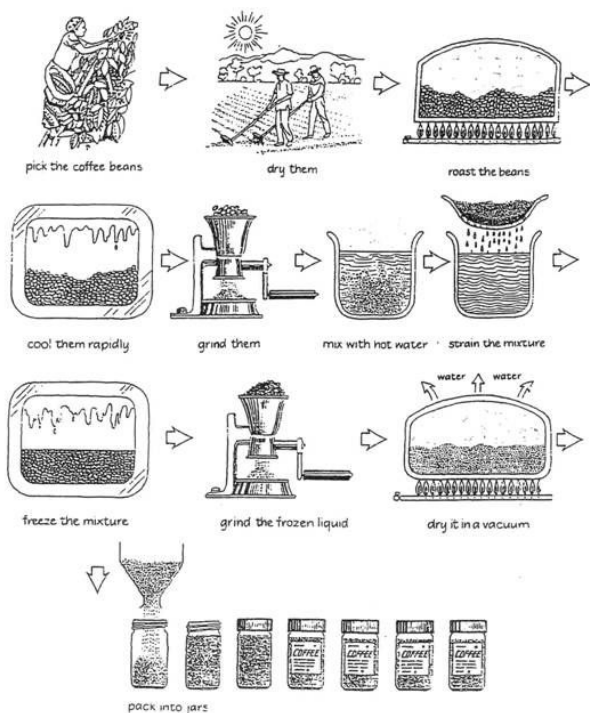
analyse model essays

Here's some example analysis of last week's essay:

- Structure- 4 paragraphs: introduction, overview, 2 specific details
- Paraphrasing- proportion of the population = percentage of people (find more examples)
- Overview- overall trend, then biggest change
- Selecting key information- first year (1940), middle years (1990, early 2000s), end of period (2030 to 2040)
- Comparing- in each country, most dramatic, and, compared to, by contrast, while, slightly lower, respectively (analyse my sentences to learn how to use these words correctly)
- Verbs- compares, increases, is expected to see, were, rose, remained... (look carefully at the use of tenses)

It's possible to read model essays quickly and learn a little. It's also possible to spend a long time studying them carefully and learn a lot!

34. IELTS Writing Task 1: process diagram summary



When describing a process diagram, most students have no problem describing the stages in the process step by step. However, not many students are able to write a good summary (or 'overview') of the process as a whole.

Think about how you would summarise this process:

Here are my tips for summarising process diagrams:

Write 2 sentences:

- First say how many stages there are in the whole process.
- Then say how/where the process begins and ends.

Did you notice the passives and sequencing phrases?

- Passives: must be picked; are dried, roasted and cooled; is mixed...
- Sequencing: then; and; at the sixth stage; next; after that; finally...

The picture illustrates the process of coffee manufacture and preparation for sale on the market.

It is clear that there are 11 stages in the production of coffee. The process begins with the picking of coffee beans, and ends at the packing stage.

Looking at the coffee production process in detail, coffee beans must first be picked in the fields. These beans are then dried, roasted, and cooled before being put in a grinding machine, which turns the beans into coffee granules.

At the sixth stage in the process, the ground coffee is mixed with hot water, and the resulting mixture is strained. Next, the mixture is frozen and then passed once again through the grinder. After that, the ground, frozen liquid is dried in a vacuum so that the water evaporates, leaving the coffee granules. Finally, these granules are packed into coffee jars for delivery to shops.

active & passive for processes

Life cycle (natural process):

The adult moth lays its eggs. The silkworm larva produces silk thread.

Production of silk cloth (man-made process):

The cocoon is boiled in water.

The silk thread is unwound, twisted and then dyed.

process diagrams Advice:

- Introduction: paraphrase the question (one sentence).
- Summary paragraph: write how many steps there are. You could also mention the first step and the last step (two sentences).
- Details: describe each step in the diagrams.

Introduction and summary paragraphs:

The figures illustrate the stages in the life of a silkworm and the process of producing silk cloth.

There are four main stages in the life cycle of the silkworm, from eggs to adult moth. The process of silk cloth production involves six steps, from silkworm cocoon to silk material.

When describing a process, verbs may be 'active' or 'passive'.

Active: A chicken lays an egg.

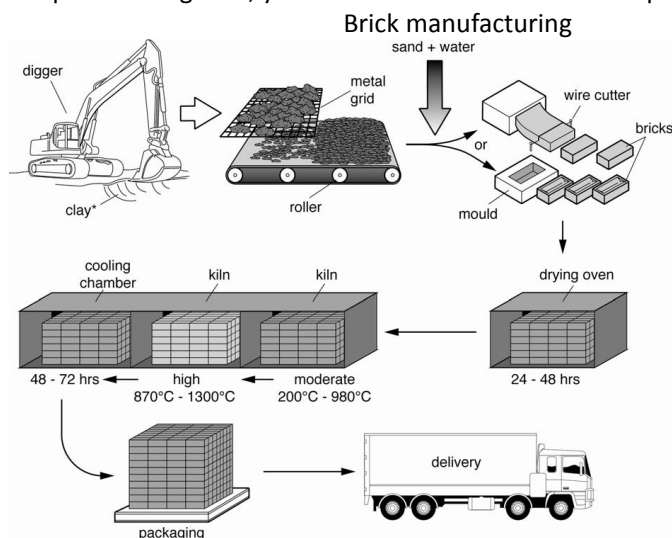
Passive: An egg is laid (by a chicken).

We often use the active to describe a natural process and the passive to describe a man-made process.

Here is some advice for describing a process diagram. The question I'm using comes from **Cambridge IELTS 6 (test 3)**

describing steps

For process diagrams, you will need to describe each step in order.



The diagram below shows the process by which bricks are manufactured for the building industry.

*Clay: type of sticky earth that is used for making bricks, pots, etc.

Here are my 2 main paragraphs describing the steps:

At the beginning of the process, clay is dug from the ground. The clay is put through a metal grid, and it passes onto a roller where it is mixed with sand and water. After that, the clay can be shaped into bricks in two ways: either it is put in a mould, or a wire cutter is used.

At the fourth stage in the process, the clay bricks are placed in a drying oven for one to two days. Next, the bricks are heated in a kiln at a moderate temperature (200 - 900 degrees Celsius) and then at a high temperature (up to 1300 degrees), before spending two to three days in a cooling chamber. Finally, the finished bricks are packaged and delivered.

Note: Look at the use of passive verbs e.g. is dug, can be shaped, are placed. I divided the stages into 2 paragraphs to make the essay easier to read.

35. avoiding common mistakes

- Don't copy the question for your introduction. You should **paraphrase** the question (i.e. rewrite it using some different words).
- Don't forget to separate your paragraphs clearly.
- Don't forget to write a good summary/overview of the information. A quick one-sentence conclusion is not good enough.
- Don't describe items separately (e.g. 2 lines on a graph). You should always try to **compare things** if it is possible to do so. Instead of describing 2 lines separately, compare the 2 lines at key points.
- Don't try to describe every number on a chart or graph (unless there are only a few numbers). A key skill in task 1 is being able to **choose the key information** and describe or compare it well. I usually mention around 6 or 7 numbers in my main paragraphs.
- Don't spend longer than 20 minutes on task 1.

Here's some advice to help you avoid common mistakes in IELTS writing task 1:

I prefer to put the overview straight after the introduction, and I try to write 2 sentences describing the information in general. You won't get a high score if you don't write a good overview.

Practise spending 5 minutes on each of your 4 paragraphs. Stop yourself after 20 minutes; remember that task 2 is worth more marks.

36. grammar mistakes

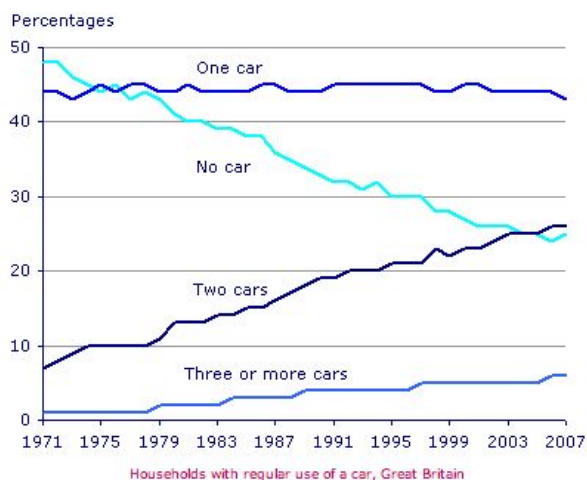
1. The first table shows us the rate of marriage and divorce between 1970 - 2000.
 2. While the divorce rate increased from 1 million to 1.5 million during the same period.
 3. As from 1990 to 2000 marriage rate has decreased relatively from 2.5 to 2 million.
 4. As shown in table 1 that the total number of marriages were high in 1970.
 5. Finally few people got divorced in 1970 than 2000.
- put a comma after 'Finally'
- 'fewer' instead of 'few' because this is a comparison

Can you find the mistakes in the following sentences?

- 1.- delete 'us' - write '1970 and 2000'
- make 'marriage' and 'divorce' plural
2. - delete 'while' because there is no contrast in this sentence
- 3.- delete 'as' - delete 'relatively'
- write 'the marriage rate'
- use the past simple 'decreased', not 'has decreased'
4. - write 'the first table shows that' instead of 'as shown in table 1 that'
- 'was' instead of 'were' because 'the total number' is singular
- I think the student means 'highest' instead of 'high'

37. line graph exercise

The graph below gives information about car ownership in Britain from 1971 to 2007.



Fill the gaps in the essay with the following words:

almost, to, figures, per, between, by, over, with, without, onwards

The graph shows changes in the number of cars _____ household in Great Britain _____ a period of 36 years.

1. per 2. over

Overall, car ownership in Britain increased _____ 1971 and 2007. In particular, the number of households with two cars rose, while the number of households _____ a car fell.

3. between 4. without

In 1971, _____ half of all British households did not have regular use of a car. Around 44% of households had one car, but only about 7% had two cars. It was uncommon for families to own three or more cars, _____ around 2% of households falling into this category.

5. almost 6. with

The one-car household was the most common type from the late 1970's _____, although there was little change in the _____ for this category. The biggest change was seen in the proportion of households without a car, which fell steadily over the 36-year period _____ around 25% in 2007. In contrast, the proportion of two-car families rose steadily, reaching about 26% in 2007, and the proportion of households with more than two cars rose _____ around 5%.

7. onwards
8. figures
9. to
10. by

38. you don't need a conclusion

You don't need to write a conclusion for IELTS writing task 1. You need to write an "overview" of the information.

But why don't you need to write a conclusion? What's the difference between a conclusion and an overview?

First, a conclusion is really a final judgement, decision or opinion. This is perfect for the task 2 essay, but task 1 asks you to write a description without analysis or opinions. On the other hand, an "overview" is a simple description of the main points. It is a summary of the information shown in the graph or chart.

Second, a conclusion should be at the end of a piece of writing. An overview or general summary could go either at the end or near the beginning. Personally, I think it's a good idea to describe the main features of the graph or chart near the beginning of your essay.

So, my suggested essay structure for task 1 looks like this:

- Introduction: what does the chart show?
- Overview / summary: what are the most noticeable features?
- Specific details: try to write 2 paragraphs.

39. how to describe future years

Past: In 1999, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA was about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico were lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2005, Internet usage in both the USA and Canada rose to around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico reached just over 25%.

Future (I've changed the years and the verbs): In 2015, the proportion of people using the Internet in the USA is expected to be about 20%. The figures for Canada and Mexico are likely to be lower, at about 10% and 5% respectively. In 2025, it is predicted that Internet usage in both the USA and Canada will rise to around 70% of the population, while the figure for Mexico should reach just over 25%.

40. comparing numbers

Emigration from the UK

The number of people leaving the UK for 12 months or more _____ record _____ in 2008, _____ an estimated 427,000 people emigrating. This _____ from 341,000 in 2007.

There has been a large _____ the number of people emigrating for work related reasons, particularly those with a definite job to go to. In 2008 an estimated 136,000 people emigrated from the UK to take up a definite job, _____ 100,000 in 2007.

41. Accuracy

The gap-fill exercise below should test whether you can describe numbers accurately. Fill the gaps with the following words: **spent, spending, for, on, at, of, accounted, contributed, was (x2)**

UK Household Expenditure in 2009

Household _____ highest in the transport category, _____ £63 a week. This included £21.10 per week _____ purchase of vehicles, £31.80 on the operation of personal transport (such as petrol, diesel, repairs and servicing) and £10.50 on transport services such as rail, tube and bus fares.

Food and non-alcoholic drink purchases _____ £51 to weekly household expenditure - £13.10 of which _____ on meat and fish, £3.70 on fresh vegetables, and £3.00 on fresh fruit. Non-alcoholic drinks _____ £4.00 _____ weekly expenditure, and £2.10 per week was spent on chocolate and confectionery.

42. IELTS Grammar: using 'see' in writing task 1

A few people have asked me about using 'see' to describe numbers on a graph or chart. Look at the following sentence: In Britain, CD sales increased dramatically in the 1980s.

We can write the same sentence in various ways using 'see':

1. Britain saw a dramatic increase in CD sales in the 1980s.
2. The 1980s saw a dramatic increase in CD sales in Britain.
3. British shops saw CD sales increase dramatically in the 1980s.

43. IELTS Writing Task 1: 'in' and 'by' with dates

Look at the following description: **In 2002**, the cost of an average house in the UK was around £130,000. **By 2007**, the average house price had risen to almost £190,000, but it fell back to just under £150,000 **in 2008**.

Notice the verbs used with "in" and "by":

1. I used "in" with the past simple (was, fell).
2. I used "by" with the past perfect (had risen) to give the idea that the increase had happened in the years leading up to 2007.
3. To avoid worrying about "by + past perfect" you could write: "Between 2002 and 2007, the average house price rose to..."

Several people have asked me how to write about future years on a graph or chart. For example, what tense should you use if the graph shows the year 2025?

Fill the gaps in the following text using the words below it. If you find any of the gaps difficult, miss them and come back to them after doing the easier ones. - in - high - increase - up - reached - with (x2) - a - compared - was

- **REACHED A** record **HIGH... WITH**

- This **WAS UP** from

- a large **INCREASE IN**

- **COMPARED WITH**

spending was ; at on

contributed was spent accounted for of

44. my thinking steps & table chart

1. I know that I can write a short introduction by paraphrasing the question.
2. I look for an overall trend. I can see that the food/drinks/tobacco category has the highest percentages, and leisure/education has the lowest.
3. Now I want to write two main body paragraphs. I need to select something to say about each country. Remember, there is no rule about what information you select; everyone will do this differently.
4. I look for the highest figures in each category: I can see that Turkey has the highest figure for food/drinks/tobacco AND for education/leisure. Italy has the highest figure for clothing/footwear.
5. So, I'll write a paragraph about Turkey and Italy.
6. My final paragraph needs to talk about Ireland, Spain and Sweden.
7. Maybe I'll point out that Ireland has a high figure for the first category, Spain has the lowest figure for education/leisure, and Sweden has the lowest figures for the first AND second categories.
8. I don't need a conclusion because I have already mentioned a general trend in point 2.

The table shows percentages of consumer expenditure for three categories of products and services in five countries in 2002.

It is clear that the largest proportion of consumer spending in each country went on food, drinks and tobacco. On the other hand, the leisure/education category has the lowest percentages in the table.

Out of the five countries, consumer spending on food, drinks and tobacco was noticeably higher in Turkey, at 32.14%, and Ireland, at nearly 29%. The proportion of spending on leisure and education was also highest in Turkey, at 4.35%, while expenditure on clothing and footwear was significantly higher in Italy, at 9%, than in any of the other countries.

It can be seen that Sweden had the lowest percentages of national consumer expenditure for food/drinks/tobacco and for clothing/footwear, at nearly 16% and just over 5% respectively. Spain had slightly higher figures for these categories, but the lowest figure for leisure/education, at only 1.98%.

45. IELTS Writing Task 1: 'water use' graph and table

(Cambridge IELTS book 6, page 30) The graph and table below give information about water use worldwide and water consumption in two different countries.

The charts compare the amount of water used for agriculture, industry and homes around the world, and water use in Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is clear that global water needs rose significantly between 1900 and 2000, and that agriculture accounted for the largest proportion of water used. We can also see that water consumption was considerably higher in Brazil than in the Congo.

In 1900, around 500km³ of water was used by the agriculture sector worldwide. The figures for industrial and domestic water consumption stood at around one fifth of that amount. By 2000, global water use for agriculture had increased to around 3000km³, industrial water use had risen to just under half that amount, and domestic consumption had reached approximately 500km³.

In the year 2000, the populations of Brazil and the Congo were 176 million and 5.2 million respectively. Water consumption per person in Brazil, at 359m³, was much higher than that in the Congo, at only 8m³, and this could be explained by the fact that Brazil had 265 times more irrigated land. (184 words, band 9)

Remember: we don't write a conclusion because a conclusion means a final decision or opinion. However, you can put the summary at the end (instead of second) if you want.

Before I worry about what language to use, it's really important to understand the information, and decide how to organise it. This is what I'm thinking:

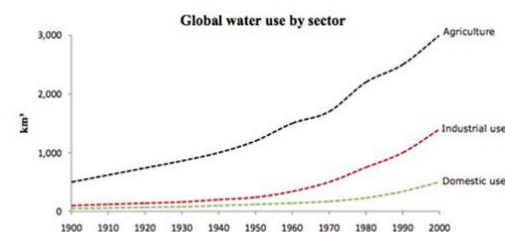
(Cambridge IELTS 7, page 30) *The table below gives information on consumer spending on different items in five different countries in 2002.*

Percentage of national consumer expenditure by category - 2002

Country	Food/Drinks/ Tobacco	Clothing/ Footwear	Leisure/ Education
Ireland	28.91%	6.43%	2.21%
Italy	16.36%	9.00%	3.20%
Spain	18.80%	6.51%	1.98%
Sweden	15.77%	5.40%	3.22%
Turkey	32.14%	6.63%	4.35%

Note:

- Which information did I choose to include in my 'summary' paragraph?
- Why did I use past and present tenses in paragraph 2?
- How did I group the information for paragraphs 3 and 4?



Water consumption in Brazil and Congo in 2000

Country	Population	Irrigated land	Water consumption per person
Brazil	176 million	26,500 km ²	359 m ³
Democratic Republic of Congo	5.2 million	100 km ²	8 m ³

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

1. Introduction- rewrite the question in a different way.
2. Summary- write one sentence summarising the trend shown on the graph, and one sentence summarising the table.
3. Details paragraph- describe the graph in detail (maybe 3 sentences).
4. Details paragraph- describe the table in detail (maybe 3 sentences).

46. IELTS Writing Task 1: pie chart practice

Introduction - just say what the pie charts show:

The pie charts compare the proportion of carbohydrates, protein and fat in three different diets, namely an average diet, a healthy diet, and a healthy diet for sport.

Summary - write 2 sentences about the main/general points:

It is noticeable that sportspeople require a diet comprising a significantly higher proportion of carbohydrates than an average diet or a healthy diet. The average diet contains the lowest percentage of carbohydrates but the highest proportion of protein.

Carbohydrates _____ 60% of the healthy diet for sport. This is 10% _____ than the proportion of carbohydrates in a normal healthy diet, and 20% more than the proportion in an average diet. On the other hand, people who eat an average diet consume a greater _____ of protein (40%) than those who eat a healthy diet (30%) and sportspeople (25%).

The third compound shown in the charts is fat. Fat _____ exactly _____ of both the average diet and the healthy diet, but the _____ to only 15% for the healthy sports diet.

47. IELTS Writing Task 1: tables

Tables seem difficult when they contain a lot of numbers. Here's some advice:

1. Try to write 4 paragraphs - introduction, summary of main points, 2 detail paragraphs.
2. Before you start writing, highlight some key numbers. Choose the biggest number in each category in the table (i.e. in each column and row). If the table shows years, look for the biggest changes in numbers over the time period. You could also mention the smallest numbers, but you can ignore 'middle' numbers (neither biggest nor smallest).
3. For your summary paragraph, try to compare whole categories (columns or rows) rather than individual 'cells' in the table. If you can't compare whole categories, compare the biggest and smallest number. Write 2 sentences for the summary.
4. In your two 'details' paragraphs, never describe each category (column or row) separately. The examiner wants to see comparisons. Try to organise the numbers you highlighted into 2 groups - one for each paragraph (e.g. highest numbers for all categories together, and lowest numbers together).
5. Describe / compare the numbers you highlighted - include at least 3 numbers in each paragraph.
6. Use the past simple for past years, and 'will' or 'is expected/predicted to' for future years. If no time is shown, use the present simple.

The table compares the average _____ of time per day that men and women in the UK spend _____ different activities.

It is clear that people in the UK spend more time _____ than doing any other daily activity. Also, there are significant differences between the time _____ by men and women on employment/study and housework.

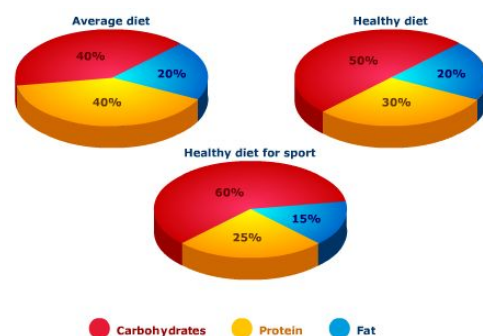
On average, men and women in the UK _____ for about 8 hours per day. Leisure _____ the second largest proportion of their time. Men spend 5 hours and 25 minutes doing various leisure activities, such as watching TV or doing sport, _____ women have 4 hours and 53 minutes of leisure time.

It is noticeable that men work or study for an average of 79 minutes more than women every day. By contrast, women spend 79 minutes more than men doing housework, and they spend _____ as much time looking after children.

Note1: Don't try to 'show off' in your introduction. Just use 'show', 'compare' or 'illustrate'; don't use words like 'depict' or 'indicate'.

Note2: There is no 'right' way to choose your main/general points. Just choose the two things that you notice first. I try to avoid specific numbers in my summaries - save numbers for the 'details' paragraphs. We'll look at those next week.

1. make
2. up
3. higher
4. relative
5. amount
6. constitutes
7. one
8. fifth
9. figure
10. drops



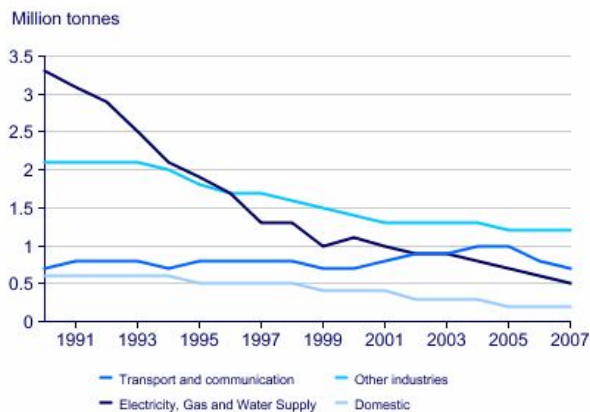
The chart below shows average hours and minutes spent by UK males and females on different daily activities.

	Hours and minutes per day	
	Males	Females
Sleep	8.04	8.18
Resting	0.43	0.48
Personal care	0.40	0.48
Eating and drinking	1.25	1.19
Leisure		
Watching TV/DVD and listen to radio/music	2.50	2.25
Social life and entertainment/culture	1.22	1.32
Hobbies and games	0.37	0.23
Sport	0.13	0.07
Reading	0.23	0.26
All leisure	5.25	4.53
Employment and study	3.45	2.26
Housework	1.41	3.00
Childcare	0.15	0.32
Voluntary work and meetings	0.15	0.20
Travel	1.32	1.22
Other	0.13	0.15

1. amount
2. doing
3. sleeping
4. spent
5. sleep
6. takes
7. up
8. while
9. over
10. twice

48. line graph exercise

The graph below shows UK acid rain emissions, measured in millions of tonnes, from four different sectors between 1990 and 2007.



The line graph compares four sectors in _____ of the amount of acid rain emissions that they produced over a period of 17 years in the UK.

terms

It is clear that the total amount of acid rain emissions in the UK _____ between 1990 and 2007. The most _____ decrease was seen in the electricity, gas and water supply sector.

fell considerably
dramatic

In 1990, around 3.3 million tonnes of acid rain emissions came from the electricity, gas and water supply. The transport and communication sector was _____ for about 0.7 million tonnes of emissions, while the domestic sector _____ around 0.6 million tonnes. Just over 2 million tonnes of acid rain gases came from other industries.

responsible
produced

Emissions from electricity, gas and water supply fell dramatically to only 0.5 million tonnes in 2007, a _____ of almost 3 million tonnes. While acid rain gases from the domestic sector and other industries fell gradually, the transport sector _____ a small increase in emissions, _____ a peak of 1 million tonnes in 2005.

drop
saw
reaching

Fill the gaps using these words:

produced, reaching, fell, responsible, saw, considerably, terms, drop, dramatic

49. general to specific

If you read any of my example essays, you will see that I always write 4 paragraphs, and I use a "general to specific" essay structure.

1. The introduction is the most general part of the essay; it tells the reader what the chart is about.
2. Then I write a paragraph about the main points or the most general points.
3. Finally, I write 2 paragraphs describing specific facts or figures.
4. I don't write a conclusion because I have already summarised the information in paragraph 2.

One reason I put the summary near the beginning (rather than at the end) is because I think it's easier to describe general things first, then specific things later.