

IELTS Academic Practice Test

Work-Life Balance

Tutor & Writing Guide

Writing Task 1: Model Answer & Analysis

The Task

The table below shows the results of a survey on the average number of hours worked per week by employees in four different European countries in 2010 and 2020.

Model Answer (Band 9)

The table provides data on the average weekly working hours for employees in four European countries—Germany, France, the UK, and Spain—for the years 2010 and 2020.

Overall, employees in all four countries saw a reduction in their average weekly working hours over the decade. The UK consistently had the highest number of working hours in both years, while Germany had the lowest in 2020.

In 2010, employees in the UK worked the longest hours, averaging 42 per week. This figure decreased by two hours to 40 in 2020, but it remained the highest of the four countries. Similarly, Spain saw a two-hour reduction from 40 to 38 hours. The most significant change was in Germany, where the average working week fell by three

hours, from 38 in 2010 to 35 in 2020, making it the country with the shortest working hours.

France experienced the smallest change, with average working hours decreasing by only one hour, from 37 in 2010 to 36 in 2020. Despite this small drop, it had the second-lowest number of working hours in both years surveyed.

(Word count: 188)

Analysis

Criterion	Analysis
Introduction	Paraphrases the prompt clearly, identifying the data type, countries, and time period.
Overview	Identifies two key features: the general trend (reduction for all) and the extremes (UK highest, Germany lowest).
Body Paragraphs	Logically groups the data. It discusses the countries with the highest hours and largest changes first, followed by the country with the smallest change.
Data	Uses data accurately to support the description.

Writing Task 2: Model Essay & Analysis

The Task

Some people believe that employers should not be allowed to contact their employees outside of working hours. Others argue that this is impractical in today's global and technology-driven economy.

Model Essay (Band 9)

The debate over whether employers should be permitted to contact employees after official working hours has become increasingly prominent in our hyper-connected world. While some argue that such contact is an unavoidable necessity in a globalised

economy, I firmly believe that establishing a legal ‘right to disconnect’ is essential for employee well-being and long-term productivity.

On the one hand, the argument for allowing out-of-hours contact is based on practicality. In many multinational corporations, teams are spread across different time zones, which can necessitate communication outside of a standard 9-to-5 schedule. For example, a project manager in London may need to contact a colleague in Singapore to resolve an urgent issue. Furthermore, certain professions, such as emergency services or IT support, inherently require on-call availability. Proponents of this view suggest that a complete ban on after-hours contact is inflexible and could hinder a company’s ability to compete in a fast-paced global market.

However, I contend that the damage caused by an ‘always-on’ work culture far outweighs these practical concerns. When employees are unable to psychologically detach from their jobs, they are at a much higher risk of chronic stress and burnout. This not only affects their mental and physical health but also diminishes their focus and creativity when they are working. A constant stream of emails and notifications erodes the personal time that is crucial for rest, recovery, and maintaining healthy relationships with family and friends. This is not a sustainable model for either the employee or the employer in the long run.

In my opinion, the solution lies in setting clear boundaries, supported by company policy and, where necessary, legislation. This does not mean a complete ban on all communication, but rather a cultural shift where out-of-hours work is the exception, not the norm. Companies can implement strategies such as scheduled email delivery and clear on-call rotas for urgent issues. The ‘right to disconnect’ laws in countries like France have shown that it is possible to protect employees’ personal time without causing economic collapse. Such policies encourage more efficient work during office hours and foster a culture of respect for employees’ time.

In conclusion, while I understand the arguments regarding the demands of the global economy, I strongly believe that the long-term health of the workforce and the sustainability of businesses depend on protecting employees from constant digital intrusion. The right to a private life, free from work, should be a protected standard, not a luxury.

(Word count: 400)

Essay Structure Analysis

Paragraph	Purpose
Introduction	Paraphrases the question, acknowledges both sides, and states the writer's position.
Body Paragraph 1	Discusses the opposing view (practicality) with examples.
Body Paragraph 2	Refutes the opposing view by presenting the writer's argument (negative effects on well-being).
Body Paragraph 3	Presents the writer's solution with supporting examples.
Conclusion	Summarizes the main points and restates the writer's position.

Useful Linking Words and Phrases

Function	Examples
Introducing the first view	On the one hand, Some people argue that, Proponents of this view suggest
Introducing the second view	However, On the other hand, I contend that
Adding information	Furthermore, Moreover, In addition
Giving examples	For instance, For example, such as
Stating your opinion	In my opinion, I firmly believe that, I strongly believe
Concluding	In conclusion, To sum up, Ultimately

Speaking Section: Guidance for Tutors

Part 2: Cue Card - Key Points to Listen For

When assessing a student's response to the Part 2 cue card ("Describe a time when you were very busy"), look for the following:

Criterion	What to Listen For
Task Achievement	Did the student cover all four bullet points (when, what, how they managed, how they felt)?
Fluency	Did the student speak continuously for 1-2 minutes without long, unnatural pauses?
Coherence	Was the story logical and easy to follow? Did they use discourse markers (e.g., "First," "Then," "At the time")?
Vocabulary	Did the student use a range of vocabulary related to work and feelings (e.g., "overwhelmed," "stressed," "deadline")?
Grammar	Did the student use a variety of tenses correctly, especially past tenses?

Part 3: Discussion - Suggested Follow-Up Questions

These questions can be used to extend the discussion and assess the student's ability to express and justify opinions on abstract topics.

- "Do you think people in your country work too much?"
 - "What are the long-term consequences of poor work-life balance for society?"
 - "Is it the government's responsibility to regulate working hours?"
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END OF TUTOR & WRITING GUIDE