

A Complete Guide to IELTS Writing

by David S. Wills

2018 Kindle Edition

Table of Contents

Introduction

Task 1	6
Types of question.....	8
A. Table	8
B. Bar Chart	10
C. Pie Chart.....	12
D. Line Graph.....	14
E. Maps.....	15
F. Process Diagram.....	16
Structure plan	18
Language	20
Vocabulary/Content.....	22
Table.....	22
Line graph.....	23
Bar chart.....	26
Pie chart	26
Comparisons of different graphs	26
Maps.....	27
Process diagram.....	28
Model answers.....	31
Sample #1: Table.....	31
Sample #2: Line Graph	32
Sample #3: Bar Chart	34
Sample #4: Pie Chart	35
Sample #5: Map	37
Sample #6: Process Diagram.....	39
Double checking.....	41
Practice tips.....	42
Task 2	44
Overview	44
Structure	46

Four or Five Paragraphs?	49
Types of Essay	53
Opinion/Argument Essay	53
Problem and Solution/Cause and Effect Essays	54
Discussion Essay	57
Advantages and Disadvantages	58
Direct or Two-part question	62
Topics	64
Language	67
Academic Language	67
Grammar	67
Vocabulary	68
Some Useful Words and Phrases	69
Double Checking	71
Model Essays	72
Essay #1	72
Essay #2	73
Essay #3	74
Essay #4	75
Essay #5	77
Essay #6	78
Extra Tips	80

Introduction

Hello, my name is David S. Wills and I'm an IELTS tutor from Scotland. I have been teaching IELTS since 2010, and in that time I have specialized in teaching writing skills. I am proud to say that I have helped hundreds of students improve their IELTS scores to the level required for immigration to places like Canada and New Zealand.

Perhaps you know my website, www.ted-ielts.com. I have been running it since 2016 because I believe all IELTS students should have access to high quality materials for free. I hate the promises that you see online from other websites, which claim that can get you a band 7 in 2 weeks, because no one can guarantee you success. Success is the reward that comes after much struggle and effort.

Ultimately, the IELTS exam is a test of your English skills. There are some "tricks" and "tips" you can learn to help improve your exam abilities, but there is no way to cheat the system. Someone with great English skills will almost certainly score highly, and someone with poor English skills will get a low band score.

Practicing for IELTS requires working on your general English ability as well as the specific exam skills that many students worry about. You need to practice constantly, learning new vocabulary and refreshing your grammar knowledge, in addition to doing practice questions and learning essay structures. It is important to assess your strengths and weaknesses, and practice accordingly.

The IELTS writing exam is perhaps the part that candidates fear the most, and when I talk with students, it is often their greatest weakness. So many times I have seen students score band 8 and 9 for reading, listening, and speaking, but get just a 6 for writing. But why is it so hard to do well in this part of the exam?

While the other parts may seem predictable, the kind of material you have to write in the IELTS writing is extremely varied. Preparation seems daunting and it is impossible to adequately prepare without someone constantly giving feedback on your work. Practice will result in improvements for each section of the exam, but it is not so easy to get better at writing. Add to this a difficult time limit and you have a very challenging test.

In 2017, I released a book called *Grammar for IELTS Writing*. It is a simple handbook that tells you everything you need to know to get a band 7 or higher in the IELTS writing exam. However, I wanted to go further and create a complete guide, as the grammar book obviously only covered one of the four areas that IELTS examiners mark.

In this book, I will tell you everything you need to know about the IELTS writing exam. As the title of the book makes clear, this is only for the academic exam. (Students sitting the general exam will need to look elsewhere for advice.) The book will be divided into two parts, according to the construction of the exam.

There are two tasks in the IELTS writing exam. The first is a "report" on a piece of visual data like a chart or a map, and the second is a more conventional essay. You are given one hour to complete both tasks.

The first requires that you write 150 words, and the second one at least 250. It is recommended that you spend 20 minutes on task 1 and 40 minutes on task 2.

You will be marked in four areas and given a band score:

- task achievement
- coherence and cohesion
- grammatical range and accuracy
- lexical resource (that means vocabulary)

Let's look at both parts of the exam in detail.

Task 1

The IELTS writing task 1 is the first task of the writing examination of IELTS. You are asked to write a minimum 150-word essay describing some sort of visual information, which can be one or more line graphs, pie or bar charts, tables, maps, or diagrams that depict a process. The purpose is to demonstrate that you are able to present given data and observe tendencies, comparing percentages or changes and identifying trends. In the case of a process diagram, you are asked to describe the process shown step by step.

There are four marking criteria to evaluate you on writing task 1, which are exactly the same in writing task 2. Each one of them counts for 25% of your final mark. The first one is called “Task Achievement” and examines whether you have actually answered the question and performed the task effectively as you were instructed to. Mistakes like not reaching the minimum word count or answering the question only partially can negatively affect your mark in “Task Achievement”. The second one, “Coherence and Cohesion”, checks two interrelated things: coherence is about the structure and flow of your text, such as your paragraphing, while cohesion is whether the reader understands what you are saying and perceives the text as a whole, something that happens, for example, if you have used linking expressions correctly.

The remaining two criteria concern the use of English and they are pretty self-explanatory. “Lexical Resource” is about your vocabulary: here your choice of words as well as their spelling is examined. To get a high mark, not only do you have to use the right words in the right place and make them feel natural but you also ought to seek some more sophisticated vocabulary and expressions to show your fluency. The last one, “Grammatical Range and Accuracy” examines your use of grammatical structures like the correct use of tenses. Using complex sentences, a variety of tenses, and advanced verb forms like passive voice will help you get a higher mark in this section. However, note the word “Accuracy” in the title. It is more important to be correct than to be adventurous in your language.

Like all IELTS scores, writing task 1 is evaluated from 0 to 9. To calculate your score, you should add all the scores from each marking criteria and then divide them by four. For example, if your score, sorted by criteria, is “Task achievement”: 9, “Coherence and Cohesion”: 7, “Lexical Resource”: 8 and “Grammatical Range and Accuracy”: 8, your total score is $(9+7+8+8)/4=32/4=8$. However, note that when you receive your final marks, there will be a single mark for the whole IELTS Writing section, without distinguishing writing tasks 1 and 2. It is possible to achieve half marks. For example, if your score is 6+6+5+5, your total score would be 5.5.

While writing task 1 seems the easiest part of the writing test, one of the most important factors that you should consider while writing it is that you are supposed to spend only 20 minutes on the task. Although this is not mandatory, and you can divide the 60 minutes of the writing test between the two tasks in any way you want, it is strongly advised that you stay within the given time frame. Doing so will enable you to have more time to concentrate on the considerably harder and more valuable second writing task and also prevent you from writing too many details.

Although the time frame might seem stressful in the beginning, remember that unlike writing task 2, the first task does not require you to imagine or recall any previous knowledge or experience in your memory, as everything you need to write the text will have already been given to you. We can describe the process of answering task 2 as a kind of technical writing: mastering the techniques of describing each one of the illustrations will allow you to apply them in the final exam and finish the task within 20 minutes. The only way to become proficient in these techniques is practice: try to write as many tasks as possible before taking the exam. Practicing will exercise your observation skills and enable you to identify the key elements and spot the trends quickly in the data or illustration you are given. Writing a lot of essays also helps to build in your memory a word bank of useful expressions and synonyms to present the data.

This guide thoroughly covers the process of writing the task, beginning from the various types of tasks that you might be given and how to read them, moving on to instructions on how to make a structure plan for your text and going through the type of vocabulary that is useful for presenting and comparing data. After that, each type of graph is thoroughly examined by giving model answers and analyzing them. In the end there are some tips that will help you prepare more effectively for the IELTS writing task 1 exam.

Types of question

Not all IELTS writing task 1 questions are the same, of course. As mentioned before, what you usually encounter in the first writing task of IELTS is some type of visual information and a question that asks you to summarize the given information by presenting the main features and making comparisons wherever possible. This is often a line graph, but not always. You may see one or more of the following:

- bar chart
- line graph
- table
- pie chart
- flow chart/ diagram
- map

While preparing to take the IELTS exam, make sure you are familiar with these sorts of data, and practice describing them. They each involve different sorts of language to describe, and different approaches to understanding them. Understanding the way data is presented in the illustration is the first step to start analyzing them and this is especially important in the case that you are given two or more different illustrations; for example, a pie chart and a bar chart.

You are allowed to use a pencil to underline, circle, or note details on the illustration in order to have a visual reference to the points of interest while you are writing the essay. Visually marking key points will help you recognize tendencies and trends that you can use in your essay. This strategy also reduces the chances of forgetting to mention some important information in your essay. While such a mistake might seem unlikely to you, sometimes exam stress can blur your reasoning, so it is better to get used to marking the points while practicing and simply follow this strategy also on the exam day.

Another essential strategy is also the one of double checking in the end. Most candidates do in fact re-read their essay after finishing it but they only concentrate on checking their spelling and grammar use. However, you might have used the perfect English but if you have mistaken data, this is going to count negatively on your score. After all, this is a task that you are not supposed to improvise but rather demonstrate your capacity to present and identify patterns in given information. To sum up, always double check the consistency of the data you have mentioned in your essay with the information that is shown on the illustration to avoid unpleasant surprises.

Below we will examine all the types of question that you might encounter, with instructions on how to read the data and choose which key points should be marked every time. I will talk about them in no particular order.

A. Table

The first type of illustration that you might encounter is a table. A table is a structure that has data arranged in rows and columns.

The typical table usually consists of three or more columns and multiple rows. As with every illustration, the first step is to read the introduction to obtain key information. In the example below, we are given

the time of the survey and the referred places : it is written that tables represent monthly highest and lowest average temperatures in London and Manchester. By looking at the units of measurement ($^{\circ}\text{C}$) we also understand that the table is about temperature.

While they are very easy to read, tables can be deceptive because their information is not visualized. In other words, it can be hard to recognize the key features you need to describe. When you encounter a table try to find the highest and lowest numbers in order to use them for a general comparison. Another thing to note is whether the numbers are going up, down or remaining stable, if they concern changes in time.

Example:

The following table contains information about average highest and lowest temperatures in London and Manchester in a period of six months.

	London		Manchester	
Month	Average highest temperature $^{\circ}\text{C}$	Average lowest temperature $^{\circ}\text{C}$	Average highest temperature $^{\circ}\text{C}$	Average lowest temperature $^{\circ}\text{C}$
July	23	15	20	14
August	23	15	20	13
September	20	13	17	11
October	16	10	13	9
November	12	7	9	6
December	9	5	8	4

In this table, at first glance, we would mark the biggest and lowest number in every column, as well as observe the trend: the numbers tend to go down as the months pass by. This could be used as the first statement about the table. We will see later how we can incorporate those remarks into our text.

Remember that you don't need to describe everything that is included, so uninteresting or insignificant data can be ignored. In a table, you really only need to pay attention to large and small numbers, and any trends or notable differences.

B. Bar Chart

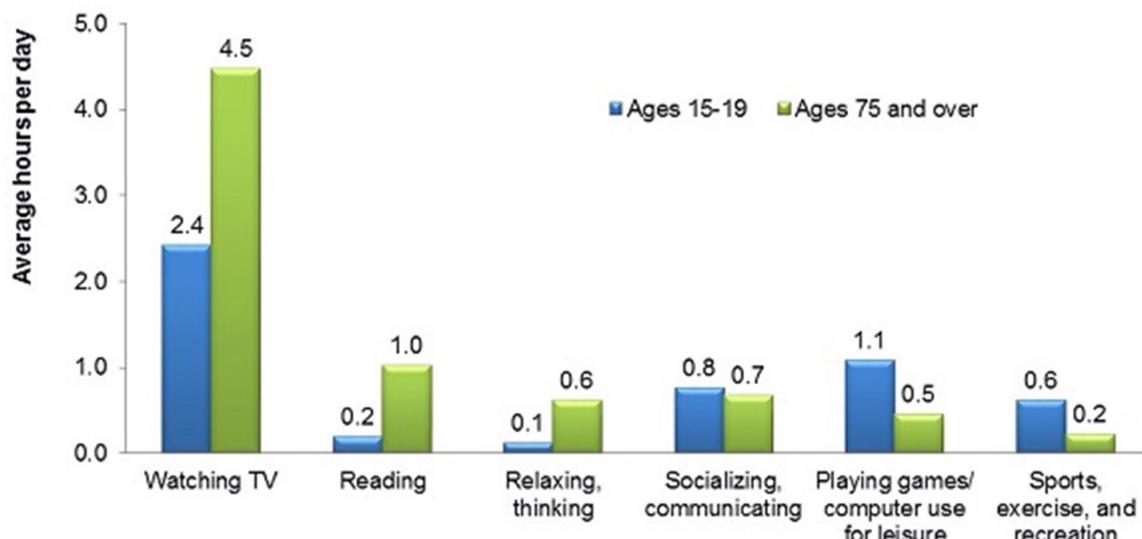
A bar chart is a graph that visualizes information in the form of rectangular bars which can be either vertical or horizontal. The bars' length corresponds to the values that they represent – usually the quantity of something. There are usually two axes: one that has numerical values and another that has some type of grouped information.

Bar charts are perhaps the easiest to understand, but you still need to be careful to avoid making mistakes, and then use appropriate language to describe your observations.

Example:

The following chart depicts information about how people aged 15-19 and over 75 spend their leisure time in the US.

Average hours spent per day in leisure and sports activities, by youngest and oldest populations



NOTE: Data include all days of the week and are annual averages for 2015.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey

Usually, IELTS bar graphs concern more than one variable, just like in this example where we are informed about the ways two different age groups spend their leisure time. Here, we begin marking key information like when the data was collected (2015) and what exactly is measured in the Y-axis. Note that although this axis is about hours, decimal numbers are used as opposed to minutes. In this case it is better to stick to expressing the hours this way: for example the age group 15-19 spends around 1.1 hour a day on the computer instead of saying 1 hour and 6 minutes which is the equivalent, because of the possibility of committing a mathematical mistake. In the horizontal axis, we note that we are provided with the different activities, which in some cases are more than one but they are grouped together.

For these reasons, the best way to approach a bar chart description is to seek out the biggest and smallest bars and compare them, noting also how they compare between categories. In the example above, you would draw attention to the fact that watching TV consumes the most time for both age groups, but that the biggest difference is in reading, as the elderly spend five times longer reading than the young folk.

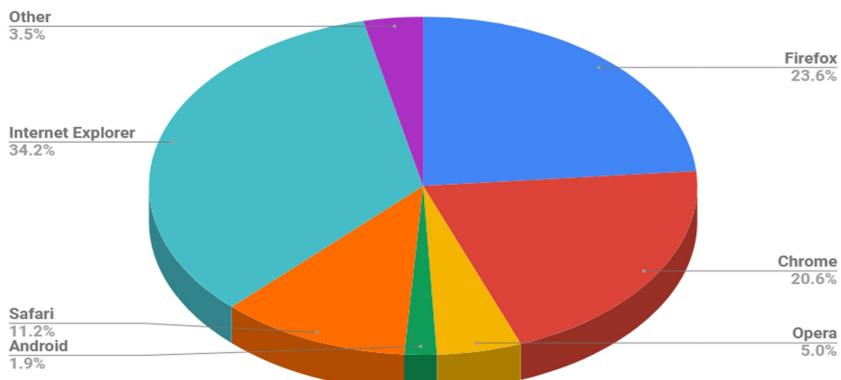
C. Pie Chart

A pie chart is a graph with a circular form that is divided into sections that can be seen as “pieces” of the pie. The whole pie represents the total quantity of the value while every “piece” represents a proportion or a share. These proportions or shares represent different categories and often come in different colors as well. This type of diagram is great in terms of expressing numerical relationships, yet most of the time in IELTS tests it does not come by itself: you are usually given two or more pie charts, or a combination of a pie chart with some other type of graph (bar chart, line graph).

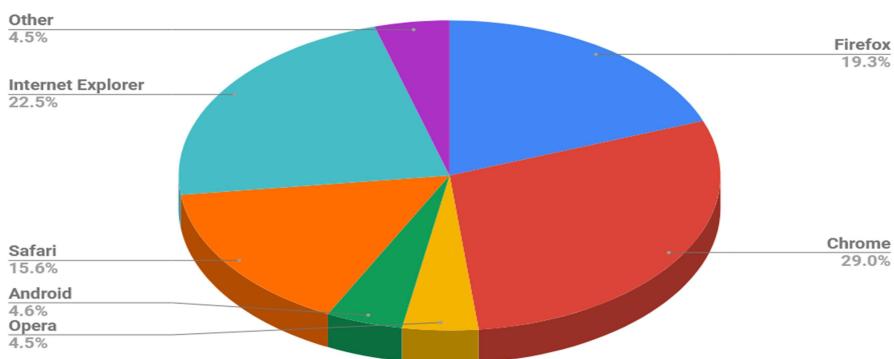
Example:

The following charts contain information about the web browsers that were used to access Wikimedia in 2011 and 2012.

Browser Usage on Wikimedia 2011



Browser Usage on Wikimedia 2012



In this question we are given two different pie charts so the first thing to assume is that we will probably be making comparisons between them. Having understood that, our first task is to find similarities and differences between the two graphs and write them down in an abbreviated way, so that we can come back to them while writing the task.

From the description, we can easily tell that both charts are about the same thing (web browsers to access Wikimedia) but they represent two different years. Since they contain the same type of data and they provide us information about some changes over time, we ought to find out whether they have the same number of sections. Looking at them, we notice that both pies are divided into seven shares with the same names. Consequently we understand that between 2011 and 2012 people used approximately the same browsers, but all of them experienced some rise or decline in popularity. From that point on, we can select some of the changes and mark them so that we can use them later in the main paragraphs.

As we said earlier, pie charts are usually graphs that come together with other illustrations. However, they are not the exception. While practicing you will stumble upon many tasks that have more than one bar chart: a line graph and a bar chart, a bar chart and a pie graph, etc. The procedure that should be followed when writing about more than one graph will be described later on.

D. Line Graph

A line graph is a type of graph with two axes: a vertical and a horizontal one. The vertical axis contains numerical values related to the theme of the graph, while the horizontal axis shows the passing of time. Information is displayed in a series of points that indicate the value of the Y-axis in a certain point in time. Those points are connected using lines, creating the line graph. A line graph might have one or more lines, depending on how many variables it presents.

Line graphs are charts that are mainly used to convey information about trends, and this is why sometimes they don't give exact numerical data, but rather focus on ups and downs over a time period. Since this type of chart is mostly used to explain how things evolve over time, this is what you should concentrate on presenting in your essay as well. Here you will use language like "increase" and "decrease" to show change as it relates to time.

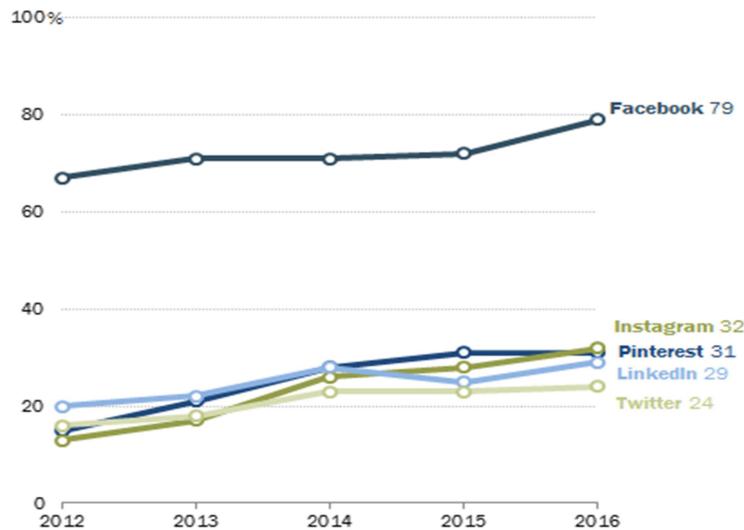
The first thing to check is how time is grouped in the horizontal axis to understand which are the time periods examined. Mark the start and finish point and note whether you have years or months or any other fraction of time in the X-axis. After that, check the type of measurement in the Y-axis. Then find the peak as well as the lowest point of every line.

Example:

The graph below shows average annual percentages of online adults who use different social networks.

Facebook remains the most popular social media platform

% of online adults who use ...



Note: 86% of Americans are currently internet users

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.

"Social Media Update 2016"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In this example, we are presented with five lines that depict five different social networks and their user popularity over four years. The popularity is measured in percentages while time is divided by years. We note that all of them reached their peak in 2016 and their lowest point was in 2012. This remark is something that we can use as our general statement in the second paragraph of the essay.

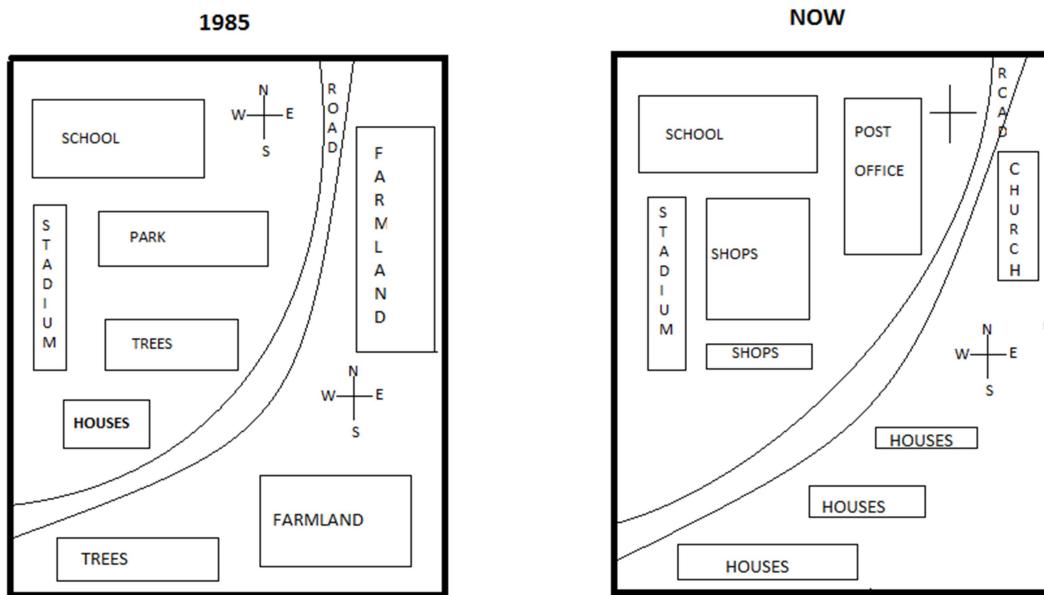
E. Maps

In this type of question you are provided with two maps, both of which illustrate the same area (often a city) in two different time periods. Those periods could be two different points in time, like for example in 1994 and 2005, or some point in the past and the present. Occasionally, there is the chance that you are given one map and you are asked to compare two different sections of it. In any case, most of the time there has been some kind of development between the two maps or sections that you have to compare: new buildings have been built in previously vacant lots, others have been demolished or replaced by new ones. Sometimes you need to describe differences between geographical features like forests or rivers.

The map type of question is clearly an essay based on comparisons. Many people find them challenging because they tend to prepare for charts and graphs, and maps require an entirely different set of vocabulary. In terms of writing, we will cover later how to perform this task effectively.

Example:

The two maps below show the changes in the town of Someville from 1986 to the present day.



Here, we have the case of two different maps that depict the same city at two different points in time. At first glance, we notice that there have been many changes and the first step is to mark them all. Apart from the differences, we should also note the similarities because they can be useful as a closing statement.

F. Process Diagram

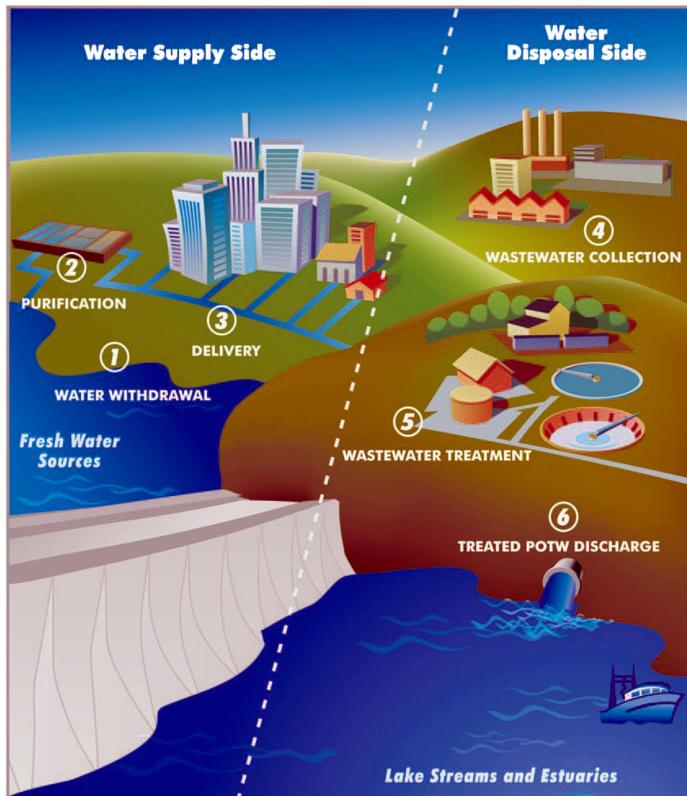
The process diagram is an illustration that most of the time presents multiple stages of how something is made or how something works. This type of diagram is the most particular one and can be tricky to read. At first glance, focus on understanding the direction of the process flow: some diagrams flow horizontally, others flow vertically and there are also the ones that depict a circular process. In this type of illustration there are usually arrows that show you the way to go. Pay attention especially in those steps where the process might split in two or more paths instead of following a linear curve. These can be difficult to understand, and even more difficult to describe.

Understanding the sequence of events in a process is crucial for your writing. Even if you are not familiar with the process itself, make sure you understand the timing: most of the steps happen one after the other but some stages may occur at the same time. Remember that each step is important in a process

and has a reason for being there so try to understand how every stage affects the next one. This will also help you form sentences that explain this causality.

Example:

The diagram below illustrates the typical urban water cycle in the United States.



In this example you can see one of the shortest processes that you may find in an IELTS exam with the advantage that it also has numbered stages. Sometimes there is no clear order, and you need to figure out where it begins and ends in order to describe it logically. Note, however, that it actually consists of two mini processes: the clean water side and the dirty water side. Separating them is the key to explaining them in a clear way. Note also that although it is called a water cycle, it is not exactly a circular process as the last and first steps are not directly connected. Thus, always pay attention to the illustration in order to understand full the way that the process is flowing.

Structure plan

After analyzing the illustration and before writing anything, try to imagine the structure of your text and write it down in the form of a plan or a schematic diagram. While this might seem a time-consuming strategy, it is wise to spend 3 to 4 minutes planning your answer as it can save you from many mistakes: forgetting important data, missing key points, or lacking text cohesion. Read the instruction carefully again, observe the given illustration, and start marking key points and planning your text's structure. It is advised to do this not only on the day of the exam, but every time you practice writing task 1. This way, you will be accustomed to it and you can come up with your own ideas of symbols and abbreviations, so that you can write a tiny plan of the whole answer in a very short amount of time.

To be able to write the plan, you should keep in mind the structure of the whole essay. In most cases, the text should be divided into three or four paragraphs. Fewer than three paragraphs will absolutely not let you pass the minimum 150-word limit, something that should be avoided at any cost, and more than four paragraphs usually means you have spent too much time on the task. Therefore, construct your plan in three or four sections, keeping the paragraphs in mind.

Concerning the structure of the task, it should be noted that most of the illustrations follow the rules that are described below, with the exception of the process diagram. The form and the content of this illustration demands a slightly different approach, mostly because it is the only type of question that does not ask for comparisons. Despite the fact that I will cover in detail every case separately later on, I would like to stress at this point that making a structure plan before starting to write is equally important in the case of the process diagram. While its design might initially deceive you into believing that you do not need one, take the time to plan it. The most crucial thing about planning is that it enables you to form the whole answer in your head before even putting your pen to paper, and thus make you more careful in linking both your sentences and paragraphs.

The first paragraph should be the **introduction**, presenting what the graph or illustration is actually about. Does it concern people, money, or production numbers? Remember that this essay is supposed to be informing someone who knows nothing about the illustration, so do not forget to give essential information like time and place. Most of the time, you can derive everything from the question of the task and make your own introduction just by rephrasing it. This is an essential IELTS skill that is called **paraphrasing**. Do not make your introduction too long: this paragraph is not where you are supposed to go into detail about the data. One or two well-constructed sentences that give all the necessary info could be enough to start off your text. You should avoid any specific information here, including numbers.

The second paragraph should indicate the **general trends** shown in your illustration. This is the point where things get different depending on the type of the task you have been given. If your illustration is a chart/graph/table that includes numbers, try not to involve them at this stage, stating only the general trends: is the trend going upwards, downwards, or remaining stable? As a rule of thumb, remember to have a general statement in the middle of your text. In the case of the process diagram, here is where you can either make a general statement like presenting the first and last step of the given process or go directly into describing the process from the beginning.

The third and possibly fourth paragraph, excluding the process diagram, is where you are supposed to **go in depth**, giving the most important details from the visual data. Whether you have been given a map, two bar charts, or a line graph, you can find elements that contrast. Often, those are changes over time or different trends and preferences according to various groups. Try to join sentences together in order to form bigger and more complex sentences. Although sometimes all comparisons and data can be provided in a single paragraph, breaking it in two makes the essay seem more organized and visually appealing as you avoid having a huge paragraph at the end in contrast to the small two previous ones. Just make sure that you group the information logically, or else it may seem strange to the reader.

In the case of the process diagram, it is these paragraphs where you should elaborate on the process by presenting the stages of the process in sequence. Write a description of the process, focusing on the most important sections, to give a comprehensive overview.

Something to remember about the two last paragraphs, which are your main text, is that you should not try to present all the illustration data and make all the comparisons possible or you might end up easily with an 800-word essay and no time for the second writing task. A useful strategy is to concentrate on three elements or comparisons and try to explain them as clearly as possible. Usually no more than seven or eight numbers should be mentioned in the last two paragraphs, although this is an indication and you should always adapt to the question. The IELTS exam is made to assess your ability to read, understand, and present data given on a graph and thus by showing two or three examples you have demonstrated your competence sufficiently. As I said before, keeping it simple and clear is the key for this task.

Finally, it is possible to include a **concluding statement**. It is not necessary to dedicate a whole paragraph to this: you can use the last sentence of the fourth paragraph to conclude your essay. In this statement, you can note a general trend you haven't mentioned before or present some surprising data that adds to or contrasts what you have already said. Note that this is not the part of the text that you explain the reason behind the data trends unless this is given to you. Keep in mind that, unlike IELTS writing task 2, this writing task is not about your personal opinion, nor any external information. Do not try to figure out why the numbers go up or down and jump to groundless conclusions. Most importantly: do not try to add data that does not exist because this can affect heavily your mark on the task. Stick to the given info, present it clearly and concisely and save some energy for the second writing task.

Why did I say that it is “possible to include” this final statement? Well, there is no 100% perfect structure that will guarantee you a high score, and different tutors will suggest different structures. The one I have outlined above is just one possibility, but I think it is a good one. Many tutors recommend not including a concluding statement, as this information would already be included in your introduction. It is important not to repeat yourself, so if you have already introduced the data, given the main trend, and described the key features, there may be no reason to write a conclusion at all.

Language

As mentioned before, both candidates' vocabulary and grammar use are assessed in this task. The good news is that unlike the second writing task, here you need a much smaller word bank. Since most of your text is about presenting numbers and percentages, comparing them, or describing a sequence of events (in the case of the process diagram), your vocabulary bank should be focused around those areas. Memorizing synonyms will add to your lexical resource and we will provide you in this guide with some of the most commonly used words for comparing and analyzing data and trends in addition to some of their alternatives that you can use.

Something to consider in this task is that it is designed to assess your capacity to carry out academic writing. This type of writing is usually characterized by a formal style with complex sentences, objectivity, and precision. Always keep this in mind and make sure to use the most appropriate vocabulary for this setting. It goes without saying that no matter if they are present in the illustration, you should definitely not use any kind of abbreviation.

Despite the limited word bank, there is enough space to demonstrate your level of English vocabulary by making use of adverbs, especially in the third and fourth paragraph. IELTS candidates often focus so much on describing the data accurately that they use simple structure sentences a lot and therefore define the depicted changes using mainly adjectives. While adjectives are very convenient, adverbs add another level of language quality to your discourse. Our advice is to always read your essay after you finish it and check if some of the adjectives you have used could be replaced with adverbs.

Here is an example:

- The average monthly temperature rose to 24 degrees.
- The average monthly temperature rose substantially to 24 degrees.

This is just a small change, but it adds more detail and accuracy. It also shows that you can handle word order, which is something many English learners struggle with.

However, apart from sophisticated, academic-level vocabulary, it is also crucial that you become familiar with signs that you might encounter: symbols like "\$", "%" or "m²" are very common in those illustrations and you should know their verbal equivalent. When English is not your first language there is a tendency to forget such words because we are not exposed to data diagrams a lot. Not using the appropriate words for the given symbols will count negatively on your grade, even if besides that, your English is perfect.

Linking phrases are equally important both to show your language competence and to maintain the text's cohesion. There are two cases of linking: linking between phrases and linking between paragraphs. The most coherent texts demonstrate both of them and make them feel natural, too. It is easier to include linking expressions in your text when there is some logic behind its structure, so make it a habit of thinking how every sentence that you want to write is connected to the previous one. It is not necessary to overdo it by using words or phrases to link each and every one sentence to the previous

one, but rather think of your essay as a text that should be easy to follow for a reader. (Also, remember to avoid using the same linking phrases, as repetition will be viewed negatively by the examiner.)

The latter can also be achieved with introductory phrases for each part of the text: expressions like “to begin with” before your general statement or “to sum up” before your conclusion. Although they might seem too typical, they are a big help to the flow. Regarding the process diagram, flow is achieved by your capacity to use words that reveal the sequence of the different stages. You ought to memorize vocabulary related to sequence so that you don’t have to repeat commonplace words like “then” and “after that” all the time.

Concerning your grammar use, it is essential that you use the correct tense throughout the essay. That depends upon the type of illustration that you have been given. In the case of the graph, chart, or diagram, you should absolutely pay attention to the data revealing the time of the survey: most of the time it concerns the past, but it also might reflect a present reality or predict some future tendency. You ought to be careful with the maps too, because they usually reflect time changes in an area and therefore probably demand the use of more than one tense. About processes, they often demand the present simple, but we will cover them to a greater extent later on.

Note that it doesn’t matter if you use British or American English but it is crucial that you don’t alternate between them. Your essay’s mark depends a lot on consistency so pick one type of English and use it from the beginning to the end of your text. If you say “colour” and the “realize” you will be penalized because the former is British and the latter is American.

Last but not least: make sure that your handwriting is clear and legible. This is something to be also included in your practice. It won’t matter if you have written the perfect essay if the examiner is unable to read it.

Vocabulary/Content

In this section, I will examine one-by-one the different types of graphs/diagrams and the specialized vocabulary required for each one. Following this, I will present you with a guide to writing for more than one types of graph in the same essay (e.g. a pie chart and a bar chart), something that you might encounter in writing task 1. Additionally, I will analyze some structures and fully explain all content issues about maps and process diagrams, which are sometimes viewed as more difficult essays, requiring a rather different approach than the others.

At the end of every segment you will find some useful words to use in your texts. Those words are provided in order to give some variety in your writing. Many candidates worry about the repetition of the same words in writing task 1, but this is not necessarily bad: sometimes, you need to use the same phrases to show that you are consistently talking about the same thing. However, in general it is true that repetition should be avoided. Variety is very important, but the most important thing is being accurate. You should seek to use words that you fully understand, rather than attempt to use a difficult word because you think it sounds advanced. Consequently, the best practice is finding a balance between repetition and variety in your vocabulary.

Useful words for every type of chart/diagram:

- Linking phrases: Regarding, as for, with respect to
- Substitutes for “show”: indicate, present, illustrate, provide

Table

As mentioned before, tables are the least visual graph of writing task 1. To inexperienced candidates, this can create some uneasiness as they cannot choose at first glance which numbers and features they should include in their essay. This is why it is very important to mark the biggest and lowest numbers so that you can also write about trends, in case the given table shows changes over time.

If you are presented with a table that has many rows or columns, keep in mind that the data should be grouped in some way. Consequently, observe it carefully to find patterns or common trends that you can write about, summarizing the data.

Think in particular about simple comparisons. Often in a table you will have to show how one number relates to another. Is it higher or lower? Although this sounds simple, it requires some practice. Look at this excerpt from a table:

Country	% of the population giving money to charity	% of the population who have volunteered time for an organization
Australia	70	38
Hong Kong	70	13
China	11	4

Here are some sentences you may use to describe this data:

- In both Australia and Hong Kong, **the same percentage of** people gave money to charity.
- China had **a far lower percentage of** its population give money to charity **than** either Australia or Hong Kong.
- The percentage of people volunteering their time to an organization in Australia **was nearly ten times higher than** in China, and **nearly three times higher than** in Hong Kong.

Most IELTS students know that paraphrasing and synonyms are very important, so they might be tempted to say something like:

- In both Australia and Hong Kong, the same number of people gave money to charity.

However, although this is grammatically correct, “percentage” and “number of people” are not interchangeable. Seventy percent of the Australian population and seventy percent of the Hong Kong population are different numbers of people, as no two countries have the exact same population.

Regarding grammar, it is generally advised to use the present tense when describing tables, unless they refer to something in the past. (Note: in my example above, the table presented data from 2011, so I used the past simple.) Most of the time, the present simple is what you need.

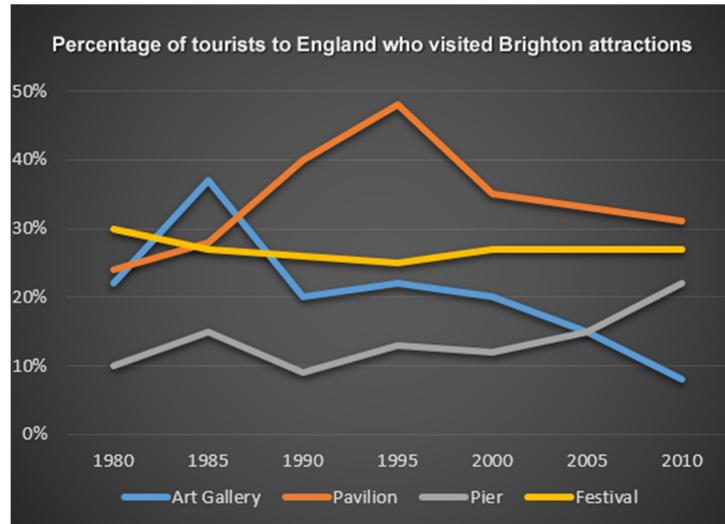
Finally, watch out for countable and uncountable nouns and use the appropriate quantifiers.

Line graph

The very first thing that you should consider before putting your pen to paper in order to write a line graph description is to check the time period presented in the horizontal axis. This information is revealing about the type of tense that you are supposed to use. More often than not, it concerns a period in time that has already passed, and thus the appropriate tense in the majority of cases is past simple. However, there is always the chance that it might concern the present or the future. In the first case, you are supposed to use present simple while in the case that it refers to the future, it is advised to use structures like *it is predicted that...will...* In addition, it is possible to talk about the trends, regardless of time, as existing purely in the data, and therefore to only use present simple. However, the examiner will view this as a rather simplistic approach, and you are not showing off your ability to be flexible with tense changes.

The most crucial thing about the line graph is to describe with words the trends that the chart illustrates using lines. While the most obvious thing would be to say whether every variable’s trend is going up or down, this is not always easy if it concerns multiple points in time and/or the lines are oscillating heavily. Remember to pick with caution which features you will present, instead of trying to put everything you see into your text, especially if the graph contains more than one variable. A line graph might involve too much information to handle in a 150-word essay, so try to group things as much as possible.

Look at this line graph:



Looking at this line graph, we can see the orange and grey lines end higher than they begin, while the yellow and blue lines end lower than they begin. Therefore, we have a very simple way to group our data. After we identify this, we can start to describe the changes in the different lines over the time period.

In terms of grammar, you can learn these two structures and, with only a little bit of variation, you can describe almost any trend.

Interest rates decreased significantly.

Subject (what you're describing) + verb + adverb

Or:

There was a significant decrease in interest rates.

There was + adjective + noun + (what you're describing)

You can use these formulas to describe most trends in line graphs. Here are some more examples:

Unemployment levels dropped slightly.

The price of gas increased suddenly.

There was a steady decline in attendance.

A good strategy to avoid unclear statements about trends that are fluctuating heavily is to state exactly this: focus on whether the trend remains stable or oscillates and mention it in your text. Of course, you should also write about rises and falls and give information about how slight or radical they are. Do not forget to write about peaks and lows as well as when they happen in the timeline of the X axis: this data is sometimes perfect to begin the third paragraph.

As you can see above, you can use verbs or nouns to describe changes given that you alter the grammar of the sentence. This is useful for avoiding repetition. For example, read the following passage:

- Interest rates increased from 5% to 6% and then increased again from 6% to 8%. They decreased to 4% and then increased once more to 7.5% before decreasing back to 5%.

It sounds awfully repetitive! Let's try mixing it up:

- Interest rates increased from 5% to 6% and then rose again from 6% to 8%. They fell to 4% and then there was an increase once more to 7.5% before dropping back to 5%.

Here are some comparable pairs:

Rose (to)	A rise
Went up (to)	A growth
Climbed (to)	An upward trend
Boomed	A boom
Increased (to)	An increase

Keep in mind that if you use the verb + to then you must follow with a number or proportion (for example, "rose to a half"). Also, most of those words can be used interchangeably, except for "boom" which suggests a large, sudden increase.

There's a big difference between the right word and the nearly right word... In IELTS, getting a higher band can be achieved by using more specific and accurate language. Instead of simply saying that something went up or went down, try using adverbs and adjectives to say **how** it went up or down.

Here's a list of some useful words:

Adjectives	Adverbs
Dramatic	Dramatically
Sharp	Sharply
Enormous	Enormously
Steep	Steeply

Bar chart

Bar charts are typically diagrams that contain percentages. They visualize them using a bar: the length is appropriate to the number of the percentage. To translate this information into words, there are multiple ways. The first and most obvious one is using numbers. You can adhere strictly to presenting the exact percentages, but you will soon find out that this is not very practical for the reader: it makes your writing seem tedious and you also lack word diversity.

One solution to this is to express numbers in an approximate way: instead of saying 51%, you can write “just over 50%”. This is a trick that helps the reader (in this case the examiner) get a better grasp of the ratio between the different percentages. After all, comparisons are a big part of this task and you ought to make them as clear as possible.

The last technique that you can apply to show comparisons is using words that express ratios like “doubled”, “three times”, and “half”. Those relations between percentages are quite obvious when you look at a bar graph, but they are not that easy to understand when you just read percentages inside an essay without looking at the illustration. Therefore, these types of words help you get the most accurate translation from the given graph to your essay.

Useful words about proportions:

- nearly, approximately, almost, around, just under/over, half, twice, three times, a quarter

Pie chart

Pie charts are quite similar to bar charts and they share most of the vocabulary. However, pie charts have a particularity of visualizing percentages as fractions of a circle. This can be useful to you because it gives you the opportunity to express percentages as proportions: expressions like one third, three quarters or half are often used in essays that describe pie charts. You should not hesitate to include them in your writing, adding some more word diversity to your text and thus getting some more points in the lexical resource mark. Like bar charts, you can describe fractions in an approximate way. You can always include the percentage number in brackets, for example “almost one fifth (19%) of users preferred Firefox to access Wikimedia in 2011”.

Useful words: half, a third, a quarter, a fifth

Comparisons of different graphs

It is quite common in writing task 1 to find more than one graphs, especially when pie charts are included. This does not make the task necessarily more difficult if you follow step-by-step the procedure that is described below every time.

1. Start by identifying the types of graphs and make sure that you understand the way each one displays information. For example, a 50% percentage in a pie chart expresses half of the whole value of the pie, but this is not true for the same percentage in a bar chart, as those charts might have variables that overlap.
2. Check which type of data every graph provides you with. You may have a line graph that shows the trends over time and a pie chart that identifies preferences by age groups. Even if you have the same type of graphs (for example two bar charts), it doesn't necessarily mean that they have the same structure or the same measuring unit in their Y-axis. Always underline key words that show you the theme of each graph.
3. Read every illustration separately and mark the key points of each one.
4. Begin your essay with an introductory statement about both graphs and the theme that they have in common.
5. In the second paragraph (or the second sentence of the first paragraph), make a general statement about each graph, identifying and comparing the main trends. Choose it carefully, because the following paragraphs will be based on that. Don't go into details but save them for the next paragraphs.
6. In the next paragraphs, you are supposed to provide data that supports what you have said earlier. However, try not to present a huge amount of data but rather keep it simple and clear. This is important: it is very easy to get carried away when you have more than one graph because there is an increased amount of information available to you. Don't fall into this trap and concentrate on giving only the most important details.

Something to note about the structure of the main content paragraph, is that it is better to separate them thematically, by writing one paragraph for the first and the other for the second graph. If there are more than two, describe the graph with the biggest amount of data in one paragraph and combine the others in another paragraph. This separation will make your essay seem tidier and better organized.

In terms of lexical resource and grammatical structures, employ as many different forms of comparison as you can to enrich your essay. Use comparative and superlative forms as well as other structures to stress your points.

Maps

As mentioned earlier, when you are presented with a map type of question in writing task 1, the most important thing to keep in mind is that although it is an illustration, it depicts an actual city/area. Therefore, your vocabulary should consist of words that describe urban and rural development, as well as spatial relationships, rather than generally speaking about transformations and changes. You are supposed to be describing a place to the reader, not a picture, and it is better to think this way from the beginning in order to be able to do it.

After writing an introduction presenting what the map is about - time and place are the most important features to mention - a general statement is needed in the second paragraph. Observe the map thoroughly and see if you can find a pattern in the changes that the city has undergone: this will be your statement. Following this, describe the changes in the third and fourth paragraph, always using

appropriate vocabulary. Remember to describe where the buildings you are referring to are situated: a trick to do this is to imagine that the reader cannot see the map at all and thus you are supposed to convey that type of information.

Finally, keep a surprising fact or a concluding statement for the end of your essay. Many candidates forget to close the essay when they are presented with a map, leaving the reader with an abrupt and clumsy ending. Try to choose from the beginning what you are going to say in the end: this will also help your essay's cohesion.

Below you can find some useful vocabulary to use with maps.

Useful words:

Directions: north, north-east, north-west, south, south-east, south-west, east, west

The northernmost/southernmost/easternmost/westernmost point of ...

Places: rural/urban landscape, coastal town, industrial zone/estate, campus, woodland, banks of a river, seaside, shores of a lake

Trees: planted, chopped

Buildings: constructed, built, erected, developed, demolished, knocked down

Changes: developments, alterations, enhancements, improvements

Verbs to use with changes: experience, witness, face, meet, undergo, go through, encounter, exhibit, record, implement

Adjectives to describe changes: dramatic, slight

Verbs that describe changes: substitute, convert, replace, transform, improve, progress, innovate, renovate

Location expressions: located, situated

Process diagram

Although process diagrams are the least frequent type of question in IELTS writing task 1, you should be equally prepared to answer them. They are surely the most specialized one, a fact that is largely based on not having to make any comparisons, in contrast to the other graphs or even the maps.

To begin with, your introduction should present all the data about the process the illustration depicts and also say what the final product is. Moving on, the general statement could be about the number of the steps of the process or about naming the first and the last stage. Another way to go is to say

whether the process is linear, meaning that it has a clear starting point and an ending point or if it is a circular process that repeats itself.

Sometimes in the process type of question it is not necessary to make a general statement because you might have it covered from the introduction. If you feel that you are just repeating yourself, you can start directly by describing the process. This could be especially useful if the process contains a lot of stages or if it is quite complicated.

As stated earlier, the key to this type of diagram is understanding the flow and the order of the steps. Having done that, you just have to describe the steps of the illustration sequentially and this is what you are asked to do in the main body paragraphs. In fact, the process diagram type of task saves you from having to select and compare data: you usually just go with the flow of the process.

In order to depict the sequential order of the steps it is necessary that you use vocabulary that expresses time connections. Although “then” and “after that” are quite useful, you should widen your word bank, including more phrases that can express a time sequence. You can find some of them in the end of this section. We encourage you to use them broadly in your practice as a means to including them in your lexical range and thus being able to recall them on the exam day.

In addition to writing the steps in sequential order, there is another technique that you can employ, which uses causality rather than timing. Using words like “so as” and “in order to”, you can express some of the process steps as cause and effects. For example, in the urban water cycle diagram that we saw earlier, you can say that “the water goes through purification in order to be delivered everywhere in the city”. Combining both techniques makes your essay rich with different words and complex sentence structures.

Finally, to conclude your essay on the process diagram you can either say something about the final product or, if it is a process that repeats itself, stress the point where the loop starts again.

Although the structure of the essay is quite simple, there are other things that make the task a little bit more complex in terms of language. In the descriptions of the process diagram, there is one grammatical structure that is very widely used: the present simple passive. As you can guess, it is a combination of the present simple, the tense to describe a procedure that repeats in time, and passive voice, which is used when there is no clear subject that performs an action. You should master this structure as much as possible and make full sentences using it.

In most cases, it is not advisable to even attempt using the active voice because the person or thing doing the action is unclear. Let's say there is a process diagram about making tables. We can assume that some skilled craftsmen built the table, but we don't know that for sure, and so this would be considered extraneous information. Instead, we would use the passive voice:

- The edges of the wood are sanded down.
- The legs are cut to a specific length.

Useful words:

Time connectors:

- First firstly the first step is that, first of all, initially, to begin with
- Secondly, next, after that, then subsequently
- The next/following step is that
- At this point, when, after which, once
- The last step, finally in the end

Model answers

Here you can find some of the model answers to each type of the writing task 1, along with an examination of their making. You absolutely do not have to adhere to them strictly: they are just examples to help you to get a grasp of what makes a typical answer in each form of the first writing task question.

Sample #1: Table

Question

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The following table contains information about average monthly highest and lowest temperatures in London and Manchester in a period of six months.

Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.

	London		Manchester	
Month	Average highest temperature °C	Average lowest temperature °C	Average highest temperature °C	Average lowest temperature °C
July	23	15	20	14
August	23	15	20	13
September	20	13	17	11
October	16	10	13	9
November	12	7	9	6
December	9	5	8	4

This table compares the average highest and lowest temperatures every month between London and Manchester, beginning in July and ending in December. Overall, both cities experience a significant drop in temperature from July to December, something quite expected.

Among the last six months of the year, London and Manchester have the highest average temperature in both July and August, at 23 and 20 degrees respectively. December is the coldest month in both cities, with the average lowest temperature going down to 5 degrees in London and 4 degrees in Manchester. Both cities seem to follow the same pattern in dropping temperature: from August to September, the average highest temperature drops by three degrees, while from September to November it drops by four degrees.

However, we can notice that overall Manchester is slightly colder than London, having an average temperature that is usually three degrees lower every month. The only month that both cities have a difference of only one degree is in December.

Words: 164

Commentary

I began my essay saying what the table is about, and then moved on to making a general statement about the most obvious trend of the table. Following this, I mentioned the average highest temperatures as well as the average lowest temperature's minimum value. I also presented a common pattern in dropping temperatures that the two cities share. Closing the essay in the final paragraph, I made a concluding statement that illustrated the temperature differences between London and Manchester.

Note that in order to present those trends, my arguments were based on some very basic mathematical calculations. This is something that happens a lot when there are tables in writing task 1: because of the lack of data visualization, you need some basic math in order to find patterns and identify trends. It might seem hard in the beginning, but the more you practice, the easier it will get.

Sample #2: Line Graph

Question

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

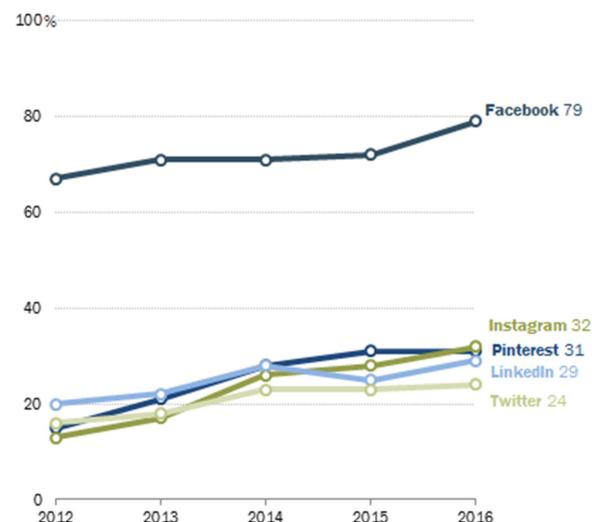
The graph shows average annual percentages of online adults who use different social networks.

Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.

Facebook remains the most popular social media platform

% of online adults who use ...



Note: 86% of Americans are currently internet users
Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.
"Social Media Update 2016"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The line graph illustrates the average annual percentage of online adults that used each one of five different social networks from 2012 to 2016. Overall, it is evident that all five social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter) experienced a significant rise in users during the period of four years.

The most popular social network was by far Facebook, beginning with around 67% in 2012, rising slightly to 70% in 2013. It remained stable for two years, but then experienced a ten percent increase from 2015 to 2016. The second most popular social media in 2016 was Instagram, which began in 2012 fifth in terms of popularity, going up more than 15% in four years.

Regarding Twitter, it rose slightly from 2012 to 2014 and then remained stable for the next two years. Likewise, Pinterest went up by almost 12% until 2014 and after that remained stable at around 30%, just lower than Instagram. Interestingly, LinkedIn was the only social network that experienced a drop in users at some point, going slightly down between 2014 and 2015 but it recovered completely in 2016.

Words: 184

Commentary

In this example, the structure of the essay was a typical one: we began with presenting what the graph is about in the first paragraph and then made a general statement about all the social networks.

Following this, we examined the trends of the two most popular ones in the next paragraph. In the last one, we commented on the remaining three, leaving the most interesting and surprising fact for the end.

Sample #3: Bar Chart

Question

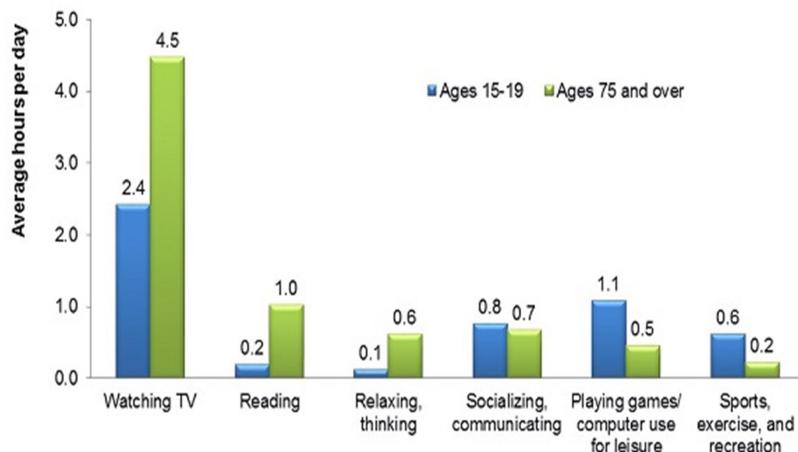
You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The graph below shows the average amount of hours that youngest and oldest populations spend in different leisure activities.

Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant.

Write more than 150 words.

Average hours spent per day in leisure and sports activities, by youngest and oldest populations



NOTE: Data include all days of the week and are annual averages for 2015.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey

The chart presents the number of hours of free time activities that were enjoyed by two different age groups (ages 15-19 and 75 and over) in a typical day in 2015, in the US, according to different hobbies.

Both age groups state watching television as the activity to which they dedicate the biggest amount of time, with older people spending on average 2.4 hours in front of the screen every day and younger ones 4.5 hours.

For people aged 15-19, the least favorite hobby seems to be relaxing and thinking, an activity that they do 0.1 hour a day whereas people over 75 appreciate it for just over half an hour daily. The same goes with reading: older people tend to read for a time period that is five times bigger in comparison to the young ones. The older age group spends the least amount of time in exercise, sports, and recreation.

Lastly, both groups spend almost the same amount of time on socializing and communicating with other people. Overall, with the exception of socializing, the chart demonstrates that younger and older people prefer to divide their free time in different types of activities in different ways.

Words: 197

Commentary

In this graph, we can notice big differences in preferences between the two age groups and thus I choose to use those in my essay. Beginning with the biggest number, which we can find in the same activity in both groups, I presented their favorite activity. Then, I moved on to their least favorite activities, along with demonstrating what the other age group's engagement in them is. To sum up, I presented the only activity in which they spend the same amount of time, along with making a general statement about the data of the graph.

This essay was a little longer than necessary, but sometimes there is enough detail in the data that you can reach almost 200 words without sounding repetitive. Just remember to watch the time limit.

Sample #4: Pie Chart

Question

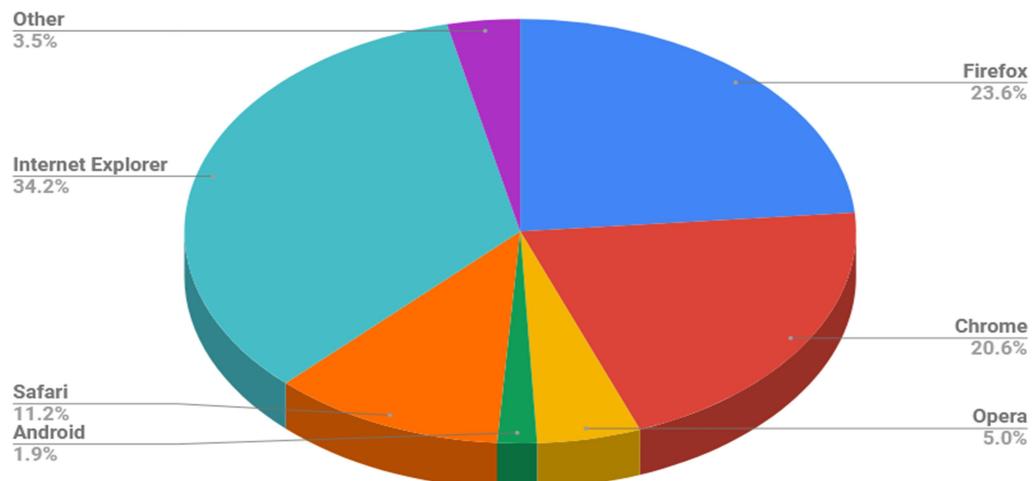
You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The pie charts below show the comparison between browser usage to access Wikimedia in two years.

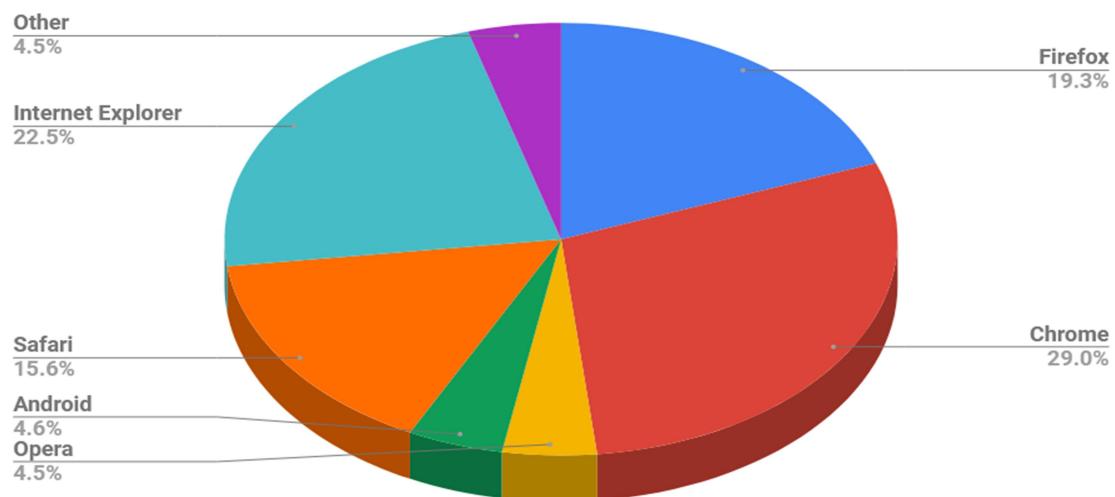
Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant.

Write more than 150 words.

Browser Usage on Wikimedia 2011



Browser Usage on Wikimedia 2012



The two pie charts compare the usage of web browsers to access Wikimedia across two years: 2011 and 2012. It is clear that there were no big changes in users' choice of web browsers between the two years as in both years Chrome, Firefox, and Internet explorer shared together more than 60% of the users that accessed Wikimedia.

In 2012, though, Chrome beat Internet Explorer as the most preferred browser, increasing its share of users by almost 9% while in the same year Internet Explorer was used by 10% fewer users compared to 2011. Safari experienced a slight increase of almost 4.5% in users while Opera remained approximately stable.

Android experienced the most dramatic change in 2012, doubling its number of users compared to the previous year. Conversely, we can see that there was an increase of just 1 percent in the use of other web browsers, excluding the ones that were previously mentioned.

Words: 154

Commentary

In this case, after the introduction, I made a general statement which describes the most obvious feature of the pie charts: that three browsers mainly dominated the market. Moving on to the second paragraph, I started by presenting the most popular browser every year and commenting on some of the less popular browsers' usage. In the last paragraph I chose Android, which experienced the biggest change overall, and closed the essay with an interesting remark about the "other" browsers.

Sample #5: Map

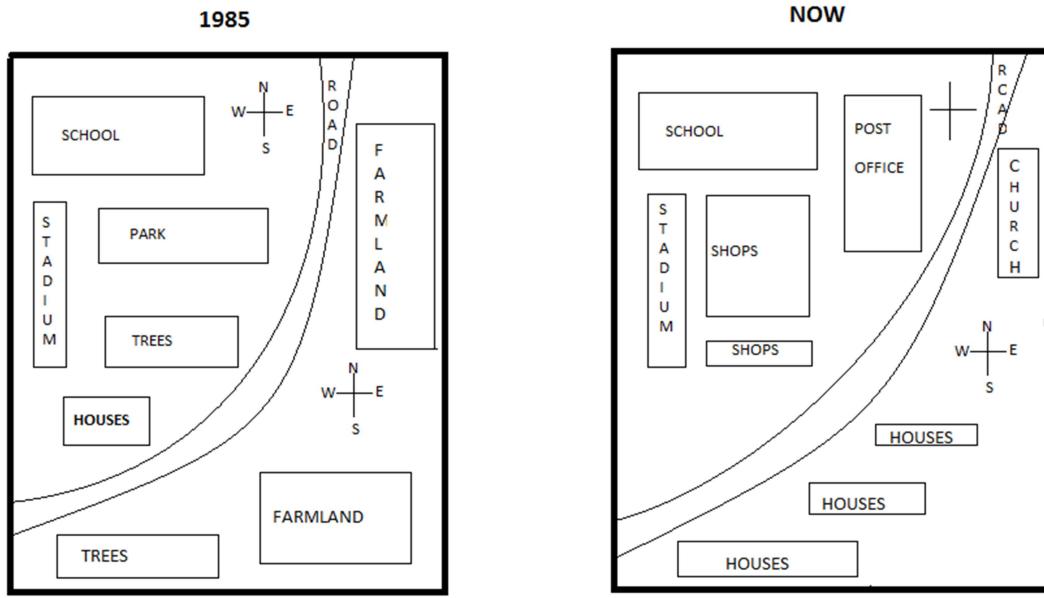
Question

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The two maps below show the changes in the town of Someville from 1986 to the present day.

Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant.

Write more than 150 words.



The two maps illustrate the main changes which have taken place in the town of Someville from 1985 to the present. Overall, the town has most notably shown an increase in building development and a vast decrease in green areas.

One of the changes that stands out is that there has been a significant redevelopment over the whole area of what was once farmland and trees to the south side of the town. Housing now dominates the area to the east and south of the main road. In 1985 there were trees as well as a park to the east side of the school, an area where shops have been built now.

Another noticeable change is that a church has been erected on the north-east side of the city, where farmland used to be located in 1985. Additionally, a post office appears in the present time next to the school. The school and the stadium are the only structures that have remained exactly the same since 1985.

Words: 167

Commentary

In this essay, I began by giving the key features: the area that I am talking about and the time period that each map illustrates. Following this, I chose to make a general statement about the pattern that I identified. Seeing that all the green spaces had been destroyed by the present time and replaced with buildings, I highlighted these trends. In the next paragraph, I supported the previous observation by presenting some of those changes. Finally, in the last paragraph I elaborated on other developments that Somerville had experienced and closed my essay with the only similarities that I found between the two maps.

Sample #6: Process Diagram

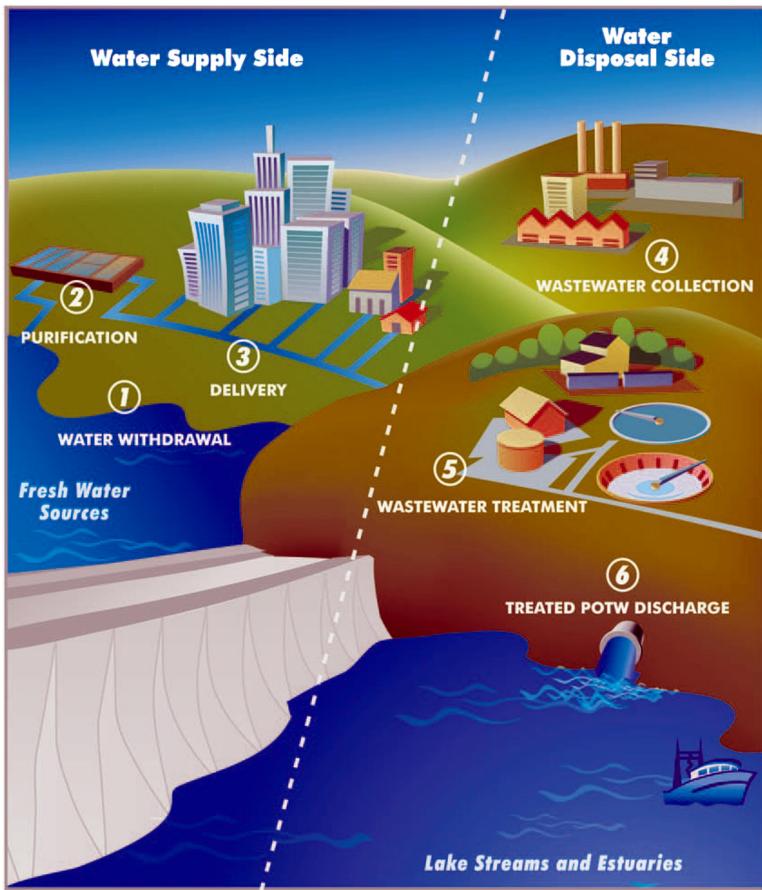
Question

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The diagram below illustrates the typical urban water cycle in the United States.

Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant.

Write at least 150 words.



The diagram explains the common cycle of water in urban environments of the United States. Overall, there are six stages in the process, beginning with the water withdrawal and ending with the waste water discharge. The process is divided in two parts: the water supply side and the water disposal side, with each side consisting of an equal number of stages.

To begin, on the supply side, the water that the city needs gets drawn from fresh water sources. This water then goes through purification and right after that, it is delivered to all the city's buildings and structures through the water grid. Following this, the water disposal process starts with the collection of waste water.

In the subsequent stage, the waste water undergoes treatment in a different facility. Finally, the treated waste water gets discharged into lakes, streams, and estuaries. It is noticeable that fresh water sources and streams where disposable water gets discharged are not connected.

Words: 158

Commentary

In this example, I began by presenting what the given illustration is about and stating the number of the process' steps. I then decided to state how the process could be divided quite simply into two parts, and gave the number of stages in each. In the third and fourth paragraph, we went on describing each step in sequence. For the concluding statement, I decided to present a feature of the illustration that is not related to the stages, but it is important in order to understand fully the urban water cycle. Also note that I used the word waste a lot as there is no other synonym that seems quite appropriate (words like "dirty" and "garbage" don't really fit here).

Double checking

I cannot overstate how important it is to check your writing when you are finished, and to make corrections and additions where necessary. Apart from checking your spelling or any missing words (especially prepositions and articles), please take some time to ask yourself the following questions every time you get to write an essay for writing task 1. I suggest that you use this list regularly and commit it to memory, making this process into a habit that you carry into the exam.

- Have I answered the question?
- Is my data correct according to the illustration?
- Have I used paragraphs and a clear structure?
- Have I made an introductory and a concluding statement?
- Have I included linking expressions and time connectors?
- Is my text coherent and easy for the reader to follow?
- Have I used academic language?
- Is my grammar, and especially the tenses I have used, appropriate?
- Have I used a range of grammatical structures?
- Have I written complex sentences?

It is also quite important to have other people look at your practice writing. Find a tutor or at least a native speaker to review your writing and point out common mistakes that you make. Once you know these mistakes, you can add them to the list above as specific points.

For example, it is really common for English learners to forget or misuse articles. If your writing tutor suggests that this is a problem, spend extra time looking for missing or misused articles. That time could be vital in correcting a big problem.

Practice tips

Now that you have gone through my guide and you have hopefully become quite familiar with the demands of the task, it is necessary that you include some specific routines in your practice. It goes without saying that the best form of preparing yourself for the IELTS writing task 1 is writing as many essays as possible. You can find a lot of books on the market, or even online, with past papers or practice essays to do this. However, be aware that there are many very poor quality books and websites with questions that are written in bad English. Avoid these if possible.

My advice is to try writing at least one task every day during your preparation. Making writing such tasks a habit will help you progress really fast. I recommend writing every day in opposition to writing many tasks in one day because the latter can be quite tiresome and less rewarding for your learning process. Instead of writing three or four tasks in one day and then taking two days off, put some effort into making it a daily habit. It might sound mundane but it will benefit you a lot in the long run.

As I suggested previously, get a writing tutor, or sign up for a writing correction service online. For a small investment, you can find out the sort of mistakes you most commonly make, and work on correcting these. I cannot overstate how important it is to fix the worst errors in your writing in order to help your score improve.

Another important thing is that you time yourself every time you get to write one of those essays. You don't have to push yourself to finish it in 20 minutes from the beginning and we recommend that you focus mostly on content when you first start practicing. Timing yourself allows you to know when you are ready to actually take the exam, so it is a useful strategy to employ in general. Do not be discouraged if you find it hard to finish the task in 20 minutes in the beginning. We have all been there and I can assure you that the more you write the easier it will get.

Other than timing the whole essay, it is useful to also track how much time you spend on each section. Knowing approximately the minutes you spend on each paragraph will let you know both which is your weakest point and also where you need to speed up. My proposal for managing the 20 minutes of writing task 1 is the following:

Reading the task and planning the structure: 3- 4 minutes

Introduction: 4-6 minutes

Second paragraph: 4 minutes

Third paragraph: 4 minutes

Rereading the essay and checking spelling/grammar: 2 minutes

Since writing less than 150 words will count negatively on your mark, it is necessary that you count the words you have written, too. If you want to save some time, you can work out how much space 150 of your words take on the page, so that you don't have to count them one-by-one. This is not a good use of your precious time.

In order to improve your language skills, reading and studying non-IELTS texts that present trends can help you expand your vocabulary and build a stock of expressions to use in writing task 1. You can find a lot of useful articles online, usually related to economics, but also combined with different fields such as environment or science. Try to subscribe to some websites that often post such articles and spend some time each day reading and observing their ways to present data.

In conclusion, the key to succeeding in IELTS writing task 1 is to keep it as simple and clear as possible. Having this in mind, you will be able to concentrate on writing with a logical structure on the exam day and not go off the track, something that happens often to overstressed candidates. In fact, the rules are very simple: write more than 150 words, separate paragraphs, and answer the question. Keep those in mind and do your best!

Task 2

Overview

IELTS writing task 2 is the second and most important task of the writing examination. In this task you are presented with a topic and you are asked to write an essay of at least 250 words responding to it. The topic can be an opinion, an argument, or a troublesome situation, and you are expected to respond to it in some way, depending on the question. You might be asked to give your opinion on the topic, discuss an argument, present the advantages and drawbacks of a situation, or discuss causes and solutions to a problem. We will extensively cover all these different types of question later on. What you should keep in mind is that regardless of the type of the question, in the end you are evaluated on your ability to express yourself in correct English, in a clear, logical and accurate way.

Just like writing task 1, there are four different criteria to evaluate your essay, each one counting for 25%, and resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 9. However, keep in mind that the four criteria are interdependent, which means that a lower mark in one of them might lower others too. Although they are exactly the same as in writing task 1, we should mention some specifications. To begin with, in "Task Achievement", you are asked to answer all parts of the question given. This means that, for example, if you are presented with a task that asks you to write about advantages and disadvantages of globalization, writing only about the advantages will make you lose points. The same will apply if you write an essay without an introduction and/or a conclusion. Remember to always pay attention to what you are asked to do.

Secondly, "Coherence and Cohesion" become slightly more challenging in this task because the text is longer and the risk of getting the reader lost in your writing increases. Try keeping a logical structure and leading the reader step-by-step into your arguments. For the third criteria, "Lexical Resource", writing task 2 gives you the chance to actually prove that you have a large vocabulary bank because it doesn't ask you to present given data but rather state your opinion on a subject. Unlike task 1, the range of the subjects is wide, which also requires you to be familiar with many different themes that could appear in your topic, such as education, work and unemployment, science, arts, society, nature and the environment, and many others. We will take an extensive look at them later on this guide. Finally, regarding the last one, "Grammatical Range and Accuracy", we will discuss it thoroughly later on.

There are two very important numbers that define task 2 and you should always remember that those numbers are 40 and 250. The first one is the number of minutes you are given to complete writing task 2, while the second one is the minimum number of words you should write. As we mentioned in the first task guide, you are given one hour to complete both writing tasks and time management is completely at your disposal. However, it is unlikely that you will be able to finish writing task 1 in fewer than twenty minutes; consequently it is better to count on a forty-minute time frame for writing task 2. That can be quite challenging in the beginning, but practice helps a lot to master completing the task in the given time. However, you should always keep track of time to avoid any unpleasant surprises on the exam day. Regarding the word limit, be aware that the examiner will count your words and there is a penalty if you write fewer than 250 words. Note that there is no upper limit, but it is advised to aim at around

270-290 to avoid presenting irrelevant information, reduce the number of grammatical errors, and to maintain cohesion. Just like time management, practice is crucial to achieve the optimal amount of words in your essay on the exam day.

Structure

Because we cannot stress enough how important it is to make a plan before starting to write, we will begin this guide to task 2 by examining the practice of planning. There are a number of reasons why planning is important. First of all, in a narrow time frame like this task's 40 minutes, a plan is necessary to manage your time effectively. Secondly, having a plan for your essay structure will help a lot in your essay's cohesion because you will stick to it and avoid getting lost in between your arguments. Finally, it will take your mind off structure while writing, allowing you to focus on using appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar. Below we will describe a simple and clear process that you should always follow before starting to write, in order to avoid mistakes that will count negatively on your "Task Achievement" and "Coherence and Cohesion" band scores.

To begin with, always carefully read the question and underline the most important words, especially the ones that reveal the topic and specific details of the question. Your first job is to find out what type of task you have been given: is it an opinion essay, a problem and solution essay, or something else? Later on this guide we will analyze all types of essays so that you are prepared to recognize them.

After finding out the type of essay and thus the matters on which you should focus, you have to analyze the topic in your head. If you are asked to give your opinion on a subject, you should decide on your opinion before starting to write. In any case, this is the moment to brainstorm ideas and write them down in an abbreviated form to avoid forgetting them.

Once you have enough ideas, you should create a writing plan that follows the paragraph structure that you intend to use. Regarding the number of paragraphs, there is no universal rule as it depends on your writing style, but in most cases having a four-paragraph structure (introduction, two main body paragraphs, conclusion) helps both in surpassing the 250-word limit and simultaneously not exceeding the 40-minute time limit. (I will give a short chapter on five-paragraph essays later.) Only after you have written down your plan should you put pen to paper. Below we will define how your essay is supposed to be divided in four paragraphs that convey all the essential information and opinions to the reader.

Firstly, your essay should begin with an introductory paragraph. The **introduction** does not have to be long: usually two or three sentences are more than enough. You should absolutely not go deep into the subject here; instead, keep your main arguments for the rest of the essay. What you are asked to do in this paragraph is to introduce the topic of the essay in simple terms, which is usually done by paraphrasing and restating the question you have been given. Additionally, you can also present your plan in one sentence, meaning what you are going to discuss and what the structure will be. If you are asked to give your opinion on a subject, you can state it in one simple sentence at the end of the paragraph and it can serve as a link to the second paragraph. Alternatively, you can list various different opinions in the introduction. In any case, you should keep in mind that the introduction is essentially used to give the first impression to the reader and thus it should reflect your essay by smoothly introducing the reader into your topic and your writing.

Right after the introduction, you are supposed to write the main part of the essay which should be divided into paragraphs. Here is where your ideas and opinions are presented and they should be well

organized and clearly outlined. As mentioned earlier, our advice considering both the word limit and the time limit is to keep the main text in **two main body/supporting paragraphs**. The logic behind separating the two paragraphs and their content depends heavily on the kind of essay you are asked to write: as you can imagine, an opinion essay will be different compared to an “advantages and disadvantages” essay (we will cover every type of essay and their respected structure later on). What you ought to keep in mind is that in the main body paragraphs you are tested on your text’s cohesion and this is something you would want to focus on while you practice.

An essay’s cohesion consists of two parts: one is the connection between the different paragraphs and the other is the linking within each paragraph. While the separation of the paragraphs depends on the given question, the structure to follow inside every paragraph remains identical. There is a four-letter acronym to help you remember this: TEDC which stands for Topic, Example, Discussion, and Conclusion. Every paragraph must begin with what is called a topic sentence, a sentence that actually introduces the paragraph’s topic. This sentence is very important for the reader because it introduces him/her to your ideas. Topic sentences also help the reader follow your plan of the essay and your rationale. The next sentences develop and support what you have said in the topic sentence, by discussing the topic and presenting relevant arguments. Just before writing the discussion sentences or at some point later, you can include one or more examples in order to make your case even stronger. The last sentence of the paragraph is a concluding sentence which ideally should lead the reader to the next paragraph, making a smooth transition and gluing the whole text together.

Keep it simple and follow this basic pattern:

- a broad statement
- more specific detail
- example
- state agreement or disagreement

In this way, you say something very general and then support your statement with more developed details, while sticking to one topic and following a logical flow.

Here is an example, taken from the IELTS topic of animals:

(1) Some people argue that zoos are important because of their role in breeding certain species.
(2) These people claim that by breeding animals in captivity, zoos are able to help stabilize or even increase the population of certain endangered species. (3) They point to the Giant Panda as an example of this sort of programme, as in China the number of pandas has recently stopped declining. (4) However, for most species breeding programmes don’t actually work, and even when they do it is impossible to return animals to the wild who have been born into captivity.

Notice how I started with a very broad statement, but one which defined the paragraph. I made my key point, and then went further by refining it in sentence two. I gave more details there, and then in sentence three I gave a good example. Finally, in the fourth sentence I refuted this argument by giving two counterpoints.

Unlike task 1, your task 2 essay *must* contain a **conclusion** paragraph. Just like the introduction, this paragraph is essential but it doesn't have to be too long: two to three sentences are enough. Begin your conclusions using a concluding expression, like "to conclude" (you can find more expressions in the vocabulary section of this guide), in order to communicate to the reader that you are about to wrap up your text: this will save you from abrupt endings. In your concluding paragraph, the main point is to restate what you have been arguing in the essay. Start with one or two general sentences that sum up the opinion, solution, or advantages and drawbacks that you have presented. Try to avoid vocabulary repetition as much as possible. You can stop there or alternatively your last sentence can add something new like a proposition or a prediction for the future.

Remember that consistency is important, so don't change your position during the essay writing. Your conclusion and introduction should say similar things, and these should be supported by the main body paragraphs. If your conclusion presents an irrelevant idea, or changes to a different position from the rest of your essay, you will be marked down. Again, this is why planning your essay in advance is so important.

A final note: If you don't want your effort to create a plan to go in vain, make sure while writing the essay that your paragraphs are clearly separated. The best practice is to leave one empty line after each paragraph, but indenting works fine as well. The key is to make the examiner easily distinguish the different paragraphs. If the examiner cannot see them, there is a possibility that you will get a lower mark.

Four or Five Paragraphs?

Above, I suggested the four-paragraph structure, but mentioned that five paragraphs are sometimes better. In this short section, I will explore the differences and give examples.

The 4-Paragraph Structure

A four-paragraph essay is going to look like this:

- Introduction
- Body paragraph 1
- Body paragraph 2
- Conclusion

Your body paragraphs will be chosen according to the question type. You may, for example, have one paragraph about advantages and another about disadvantages. You may have a paragraph about problems and another about solutions. However, there will always be two body paragraphs, and each should contain a different idea.

Here is an example of how it could be used:

The best way to travel is travel in a group led by a tour guide.

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

You could structure a 4-paragraph essay like this:

- Introduction – restate the question, outline essay
- Para #1 – state counterpoint, explain why I disagree
- Para #2 – reason why independent travel is good, explain
- Conclusion

Here is my sample answer:

Nowadays, more people are travelling around the world and some of them choose to do it in tour groups. There are various reasons why they travel like this, but others strongly disagree with this method of tourism, and instead prefer to travel alone, or with a smaller group, such as friends or family. This essay will argue that independent travel is preferable to guided tours.

There are many reasons why people prefer to travel in groups. Some of the most common reasons are that it is cheaper, more convenient, and you are guided by an expert who will speak your language and be able to give you important information. This is mostly true, but it also creates an artificial environment by alienating the travellers from the place they visit. Tourists in large groups are surrounded primarily by other tourists, taken to pre-arranged locations, and given access only to what the tour suggests. They are therefore losing out on many experiences available to those who travel more freely.

People who travel by themselves are able to choose their own itinerary and, if they like, change that itinerary according to their preference. For example, say they decided to travel through the islands of Thailand. They may really enjoy one island and decide to stay there for longer, rather than stick to the original schedule. Moreover, their experience will be more authentic as they are able to converse with the locals and explore a place naturally.

Some people may argue that getting lost or having translation issues are problems that would ruin a holiday, but on the contrary, they provide adventure and experience. Guided travel certainly makes travel easier, but it doesn't make it better.

Word count: 282

Pros and Cons

In the above example, I was able to take the two ideas – being for or against tour groups – and devote a paragraph to each. This is a really simple way of structuring an essay, yet it is almost always effective. On the other hand, it could sometimes be limiting. Certain types of question, like problem/solution or the two-part question, may work out better with a 5-paragraph structure.

On the other hand, the four-paragraph structure may allow for more development within the paragraph, thereby showing a greater ability to express your ideas. For example, you could:

- State an advantage
- Explain
- Give an example

Whereas, with the time and space constraints, this may be harder to do with five paragraphs.

The 5-Paragraph Structure

The five-paragraph structure is more complex than the four-paragraph structure, but it needn't be much more difficult to use. Here's an example of how it may appear:

- Introduction
- Body paragraph 1
- Body paragraph 2
- Body paragraph 3
- Conclusion

As you see, this allows us to include more ideas in the body of the paragraph, which has both advantages and disadvantages, as we shall see.

I will write another plan and essay based upon the same question above:

- Introduction – restate the question and outline essay
- Para #1 – arguments for group travel
- Para #2 – 1st argument against group travel, explain
- Para #3 – 2nd argument against group travel, explain
- Conclusion

As you can see, this allows me to more clearly divide my arguments, rather than condense two ideas into one paragraph.

Here's my 5-paragraph essay:

Nowadays, more people are travelling around the world and some of them choose to do it in tour groups. There are various reasons why they travel like this, but others strongly disagree with this method of tourism, and instead prefer to travel alone, or with a smaller group, such as friends or family. This essay will argue that independent travel is preferable to guided tours.

The reasons why people prefer guided group tours are numerous. Many people prefer this means of travelling because it is often cheaper, more convenient, and allows them access to a knowledgeable guide who can help them understand the area better. However, although these reasons are mostly true, there is more to be gained by travelling alone or in a small, independent group.

For one thing, travelling alone allows a greater degree of freedom. If you arrange your own itinerary, you can go where you like and even choose to change this according to circumstances. For example, if you are travelling the islands around Thailand, you may find one that is better than the others and choose to spend more time there.

In addition, the experience of travelling without a tour guide is more authentic. Arranged tours usually take people to the most common destinations, where you only see the same things that other tourists see. You seldom get to see the authentic life of people in that place. Even if it is more difficult, it is better to explore independently than be guided.

In conclusion, although there are many apparent benefits to travelling in large guided groups, it is preferable to travel independently. Chief among the reasons in favour of this mode of travel are the freedom and authenticity they provide.

Word count: 286

Pros and Cons

The five-paragraph structure may seem harder to construct, and perhaps it is, but it is not much more difficult than the four-paragraph structure. Perhaps paradoxically, it can make structuring easier because, instead of condensing various arguments into a single paragraph, you can instead add a second

argument to an additional paragraph. Then again, it is easier to include too many ideas or even to stray off topic with more paragraphs. Make sure to plan carefully and choose your arguments before you begin writing.

Conclusion

So which is the better structure to use for your essays?

The answer is... it's a personal choice.

Remember, there is no one perfect way of writing an essay. Different people will have different methods. Both 4- and 5-paragraph essays are completely fine to use in the IELTS writing task 2. As long as you use the structures correctly, either one could get you a band 7.0 or even higher. The important thing is that you plan your essay carefully and don't go off-topic.

Don't worry about word length, either. Look at my example essays above. The 5-paragraph essay is only a few words longer than the 4-paragraph essay!

However, I would say that since the 4-paragraph structure is slightly easier to use, it has my recommendation.

Types of Essay

There are five different types of essay that you might encounter in writing task 2:

- opinion essays
- discussion essays
- problem and solution essays
- advantages and disadvantages essays
- two-part question tasks

Recognizing them and responding accordingly is crucial as it is part of “Task Achievement”. For instance, you might be graded very poorly if you write an opinion essay while you are not asked for your opinion. Remember that you have to actually answer the question and not just write generally about the topic. To identify the type of essay you are supposed to write, you have to closely examine the given question. Fortunately, there are some key expressions that we will reveal later on that are used very often in IELTS writing task 2 and help you recognize the type of essay. Below we will examine all five different types along with a proposed text structure for each one.

Opinion/Argument Essay

What we call an opinion or argumentative essay is one of the most frequent types of question featured in IELTS writing task 2. You are given a topic and asked to give your opinion on it, supporting your arguments with reasons and examples. This type of essay can usually be recognized by the question following the topic, which is often along the lines of “Do you agree or disagree with this statement”, “How far do you agree with this statement?” or “To what extent do you agree with this statement?” You can see such an example below.

Opinion Essay Example Question

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Elderly people should spend more time on cultural activities such as music and theatre and less time on physical activities such as sport. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

The main point of the argumentative essay is to clearly state your opinion. You are allowed to have a strong opinion about the subject or a more balanced one, but you are supposed to make where you stand on the topic very clear, both in the introduction and the rest of your essay.

In order to make your opinion clear and justified, you need to present **arguments** and **examples**. The latter will also make you sound convincing and help you avoid overgeneralizing. Therefore, the structure of the essay should be focused around your belief, which should be stated in the last sentence of the introduction, right after having presented the topic by rephrasing the given question of the task.

The main body paragraphs should contain your main points that support your opinion. A nice way to organize them is to make one paragraph for every point, supporting it with examples and arguments. Two or three points are enough for your 250-word essay and the time limit. If you wish to have a less strong and more balanced opinion, you can state an alternative opinion to the one you support, creating a third supporting paragraph. However, remember to keep it brief: the biggest part of your essay should be always your predominant opinion. In the end, conclude your essay with the main points and re-state your opinion: you can also make some prediction for the future here.

Many candidates are worried about not having the vocabulary and language ability to express their arguments in English in an accurate way. Keep in mind that you don't have to present your honest opinion. No one will judge you on whether you have told the truth or if your opinion is likeable, but rather on your ability to express and articulate your beliefs in good English. Especially when asked whether you agree or disagree with a statement, it is wise to choose the easiest option. Instead of trying to incorporate fancy ideas in your essay, writing about what you know will help you keep it accurate and clear.

You can find an example of the structure below. This is how the plan you are supposed to make before writing should look like. By practicing a lot, you can accommodate this plan into your own writing style and use the abbreviations that are convenient to you.

Opinion Essay Example Structure

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): re-state the dilemma and state that I mostly disagree
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): sport is a great way to improve your health, with a bigger effect on physical activity compared to music or theater + example
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): in contrast to cultural activities that mostly happen indoors, sport helps elderly people get outdoors and in touch with nature + example
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): re-state the reasons why elderly people should focus more on physical activities

Problem and Solution/Cause and Effect Essays

There are two distinct but related types of essays that fall into this category. The first one is the problem and solution essay. Here, the task presents you with some kind of problem and you are asked to analyze it, and then to propose solutions. To recognize this type of essay, look for the keywords "problem" and "solution". (In some cases, you will need to find synonyms for these keywords.)

Problem and Solution Example Question

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Highways are useful in order to travel quickly and cover long distances but they also cause problems.
What are the problems of motorways and what solutions are there?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Problem and solution essays always present you with a troublesome situation in the task. In order to illustrate this situation in your introduction you need to paraphrase the question. This is not an opinion essay, so in the last phrase of the introduction, we advise you to write about the structure that your essay is going to have, so that it will be easier for the reader to follow your course of thought. Some people call this a “thesis statement”.

For problem and solution essays there are two possible structures regarding the main body paragraphs. After introducing the situation in the first paragraph, you can either present all the problems in one paragraph and all the solutions in the other (structure example A), or dedicate one paragraph in each problem and its solution (structure example B). Both of these are perfectly acceptable options.

Problem and Solution Essay Example Structure A

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): describe the highway situation and say that I will present the problems and after that the solutions
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): problems that are caused by highways (too much noise, car accidents because of the speed, fewer green areas in order to construct them)
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): solutions to the previous problems (getting them further from residential areas, maintenance, better planning)
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): state that highways cause many problems but there are solutions to those that could be planned in order to minimize them, say that this is important as more highways will probably be constructed in the near future

In the following example, we opted for three supporting paragraphs due to the number of combinations of the problems and solutions. The three paragraphs will be shorter than the two main body paragraphs of the previous structure example.

Problem and Solution Essay Example Structure B

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): describe the highway situation and say that I will present both problems and solution to this
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): problem 1 (too much noise) and solution 1 (getting them further from residential areas)
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): problem 2 (car accidents because of the speed) and solution 2 (better maintenance)
- Paragraph 4 (supporting paragraph 3): , problem 3 (fewer green areas in order to construct them) and solution 3 (better planning)
- Paragraph 5 (conclusion): state that highways cause many problems but there are solution to those that could be planned in order to minimize them, say that this is important as more highways will probably be constructed in the near future

The second type of essay is the cause and effect essay. This type of question presents you with a situation that can be troublesome, or perhaps a current phenomenon, and asks you to illustrate its causes and effects. The expressions that help you recognize this type of essay are usually “Discuss the causes and effects...” or “How does this affect...?” Sometimes causes or effects are used in two-part question essays, a different type of the writing task 2 that we will examine later on.

Causes and Effects Example Question

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Nowadays, people are traveling around the world more than ever.

What are the main reasons of this phenomenon? To what consequences does it lead?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

For cause and effect essays, it is advised to follow the argument essay structure. Usually, causes and effects are grouped and presented in separate supporting paragraphs. They can also be merged and presented in different paragraphs (one paragraph for cause 1 and effect 1 , then another for cause 2 and effect 2), just like the second structure example of the problem and solution essay. However, our advice is to keep them separate because causes and effects might not be directly related, and grouping them together might mess up your text's cohesion and create misunderstandings and logical leaps. Although no one will judge you on what kind of arguments you have used, it might lead the examiner to believe that your English is not very good if you make such mistakes, so it is better to avoid them.

Causes and Effects Example Structure

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): describe increases in travel habits
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): write about the causes (faster transport, cheaper tickets) + examples
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): write about the effects (people's horizons are wider now, bigger tourist industry) + examples
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): restate the increase in travel habits and predict that it will continue in the future with the improvement transportation

Discussion Essay

The discussion essay is usually recognized by phrases like "Analyze both sides of this argument" or "Discuss this statement." Pay attention to these expressions as this type of essay is the most probable to be accidentally mixed up with a different type, particularly the opinion essay. Always read the question carefully in order not to confuse it with something else. Keep in mind that the examiner will expect a specific structure and content for the discussion essay and writing so a different essay will cause you to do poorly in "Task Achievement." Because of the frequent confusion between the opinion and the discussion essay, we will now examine the main differences between them.

In a discussion essay, you are asked to discuss and analyze more than one view and following this you are supposed to reach a conclusion. On the other hand, in an opinion essay your purpose is to state one opinion (yours) and prove it by presenting relevant arguments and examples. An opinion essay is a subjective matter, while in a discussion essay you are asked to be more objective and write also about opinions of other people. By contrast, in an opinion essay you are not obliged to mention other people's beliefs, but rather support your own giving reasons and examples.

As mentioned before, in a discussion essay you should elaborate on both views and our advice is to write a similar number of words/sentences for each opinion. This will be easy to do if you dedicate one main body paragraph to each point of view. Note that there are two types of discussion essays: the ones that demand from you to just discuss the subject and the others that ask you to also give your opinion. Keep in mind that if an essay doesn't ask for your opinion you should not give it. In the opposite case,

you don't need to add an extra paragraph for your opinion, but rather make it clear both in the introduction and in the conclusion of your essay. Below you will find an example of a discussion essay that asks the candidate's opinion as well.

Discussion Essay Example Question

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Some people think that studying in university is the optimal route to a successful career, while others support that it is better to get a job right after high school.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

The structure for the previous example would be the following:

Discussion Essay Example Structure

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): introduce the topic and the dilemma, state my opinion (in favor of university)
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): reasons for studying in university (job prospects with higher salaries, more options to do what you want)
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): examine the opposite view (no student loans, make money immediately, and have more years of work experience)
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): restate the dilemma and say again my opinion in favor of going to university

Advantages and Disadvantages

This type of essay typically presents the candidates with a situation and asks them to list the situation's advantages and disadvantages. It can usually be recognized by the words "advantages and disadvantages," but synonyms may be used instead. Additionally, you should be very careful about what exactly you are being asked. Although most of the time a task mentions advantages and disadvantages, you should read the question carefully because there are exceptions to this rule. For instance, a question like "Do you feel this topic has more advantages than disadvantages?" demands that the candidate weighs them and gives his/her opinion in addition to listing the pros and cons. Failing to do so would result in a lower mark in "Task Achievement". Similarly, "Analyse the advantages and disadvantages of this and form an opinion" prompts to a discussion essay. To summarize, you need to pay attention to the question given in order to identify what you should write and which structure you should follow to respond to the task in a complete way.

Advantages and Disadvantages Example Question #1

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Nowadays, the number of people that are working remotely increases constantly.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

In the case that you are given a task like the previous example, where you are asked to examine only the advantages and disadvantages of a situation, the structure of the essay is quite simple and straightforward. Begin with the introduction, presenting the situation and the structure that you are going to follow: this is crucial for the reader because he/she has to know that your essay covers both advantages and drawbacks. Right after this, you should write the supporting paragraphs where you actually examine both of them. The most common and coherent structure is to make one paragraph where you list all the advantages and another with all the disadvantages. It is important to present them in turn in order not to confuse the reader. Regarding the content of the paragraphs, listing two or three for each category (for example two drawbacks and two advantages) is more than enough for the word limit and the time given. You can also create more than two supporting paragraphs if you feel that you need more space to present your ideas. What is important, however, is to try to keep it even between the space you dedicate to the pros and the cons, even if you create more than two paragraphs.

Advantages and Disadvantages Example Structure #1

The structure for the previous example would be the following:

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): introduce the situation of working from home by restating the question + state the structure of the essay that will present the advantages and disadvantages
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): advantages (no commute time, freedom to arrange schedule as one wants)
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): disadvantages (lack of feedback from colleagues, sometimes less efficient because of the lack of formal work hours)
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): restate the increase of the phenomenon of working remotely and predict that it will continue to rise in the future

Advantages and Disadvantages Example Question #2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

The use of social media has as many disadvantages as they do advantages. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

In this example, you are presented with a task that demands you to discuss the advantages and disadvantages as well as give your opinion on whether one of them outweighs the other. As stated earlier, this is a hybrid style of an essay that combines both examining the advantages and drawbacks as well as the structure of the discussion essay. There are two different styles of structuring the response to this task.

The first one (we will call it *style A*) presents the situation in the introduction in an objective manner. After that, the advantages are illustrated in the first supporting paragraph, followed by the disadvantages in the second one. The writer's opinion is presented in the conclusion paragraph. This structure style is better applied when the writer supports a more balanced opinion compared to a strong one, which is better presented with *style B*. Below you can find the structure for *style A*, in an essay where the candidate believes that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

Advantages and Disadvantages Example Structure #2 style A

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): write about social media and its increasing importance in our everyday lives, state that this essay will examine their advantages and disadvantages before stating an opinion
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): advantages (communication around the planet, sharing information in an easy way for free)
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): disadvantages (addiction to being online all the time, potentially dangerous for bullying especially for underage people)
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): opinion (advantages outweigh the disadvantages, the latter can be solved with certain measures)

Style B on the other hand, follows mostly the structure of a discussion essay by stating an opinion and then presenting the advantages and disadvantages in the main body paragraphs, supporting the initial thesis but allowing also room for the opposite opinion. In detail, in this style, the writer shares his/her opinion from the beginning of the essay, using the last sentence of the introduction to state clearly where they stand on the subject. After that, the first main body paragraph is used to support his/her thesis, presenting either the advantages or the disadvantages, depending on their belief (note that it's your choice whether you will present the advantages or the drawbacks first). The second main paragraph illustrates the opposite opinion, in the style of the discussion essay. In the conclusion they restate their opinion. Below we will present the structure of the essay in the *style B*, with the writer believing that social media has more disadvantages compared to advantages.

Advantages and Disadvantages Example Structure #2 Style B

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): present the importance of social media in modern society, say that many dangers are hidden and that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages in my opinion
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): support my thesis by presenting the disadvantages (addiction to being online all the time, potentially dangerous for bullying especially for young people, no control over the information that one posts online)
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): illustrate the opposite opinion by examining the advantages (communication around the planet, sharing information in an easy way for free)
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): restate my opinion about the disadvantages and say that social media are a modern phenomenon that keeps expanding and should be treated and used with care

Direct or Two-part question

This type of essay is not exactly a new one but rather a combination of the previous types. It involves two questions, sometimes in the form of one two-part question, that usually ask the candidate to state an opinion and then expand on it in a specified way, perhaps by giving suggestions or proposals.

In this task it is crucial that the candidate answers both questions in order not to fail the task. The structure of this essay does not have a standard form as it depends on the questions. However, it is generally advised to keep a 4-paragraph structure, with each of the main body paragraphs devoted to one of the questions.

Those questions, however, are more particular, meaning that they are direct questions that ask the candidate about something. Most of the time, they refer to the candidate's opinion. For example, a question like "What makes a successful person?" asks for your opinion and not for some general rule of success. It is crucial in this type of task that you recognize what exactly you are being asked because usually the two questions create a task combination of two different essays. For instance, you might be asked what your opinion is on a phenomenon and what the effects are of this phenomenon. You should absolutely not start talking about the causes of this phenomenon in your essay, because the examiner will believe that you have not understood what you were supposed to do in the task. It is critical in two-part question essays that you stick to the questions given and answer them.

Two-part Example Question

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

University students should be encouraged to publicly critique their teachers online for the purpose of improving a country's education system. Do you agree with this statement? What are some other ways university education could be improved?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

In this example, the task demands the candidate's opinion as well as some proposals/solutions in order to improve university education. As we stated earlier, you should not get confused here and start writing about the problems in the educational system, as the task clearly asks your opinion on public criticism of teachers and some solutions in order to improve university education. We will dedicate a

paragraph to each question and try to keep their length even. The structure for the previous example would be the following:

Two-part Question Example Structure

- Paragraph 1 (introduction): introduce the topic of improving university education + say that I mostly agree with students evaluating the teachers but with some prerequisites
- Paragraph 2 (supporting paragraph 1): answer the first question, expanding on the fact that I agree, but not publicly - criticism can be done within the university to avoid possible defamation
- Paragraph 3 (supporting paragraph 2): answer the second question, saying that university education can be improved by continuous training of the teachers and evaluation from external partners
- Paragraph 4 (conclusion): repeat my response about all the ways that a country's university education can be improved (student evaluation of teachers, training and external evaluation)

Topics

When preparing for the IELTS exam, it can be useful to think in terms of topics. This can help you to think about potential vocabulary that you need to learn, but it is also useful in predicting the sorts of questions you may be asked to write about. The topics that you will be asked to elaborate on in writing task 2 come from a wide variety of subjects: education, science, health, social issues, work, media, and technology are some the most commonly encountered ones.

It is clearly stated in the instructions of the task that you are supposed to draw arguments and examples from your own knowledge and personal experience. While that might seem obvious, it is crucial that you are well informed about these subjects. While you are certainly not required to be an expert scientist, you should be able to say a little about pollution and climate change; and, likewise, you needn't know the intricacies of data science, but you should be able to name a few features of social media. To help prepare for this sort of writing, you should read news items daily, and make notes. Not only will you be better informed this way, but you will also become more familiar with the academic language, writing structure, as well as some useful expressions. Similarly, it is useful to examine model essays to get familiar with all the previously mentioned aspects.

Another helpful strategy to expand your vocabulary and word bank while reading articles and model essays is to write down new words and ideas that you encounter. The best practice is to arrange them by topic in order to be able to go back to them and revise them during the days before the actual exam. In addition, writing them down will help you keep them in your memory for a longer period of time.

Below I will list some of the most common topics of the second task and their specifications. Obviously, it is impossible to cover every possible topic and/or topic combinations; consequently, our suggestion is to do some research on past papers on your own in order to get accustomed to different topics and the way that those are formulated in IELTS. Another useful strategy is to note down ideas and words sorted by topic.

Education

Education, teaching, and educational systems are some of the most common topics in IELTS and they often appear in opinion and problem and solution essays. Criticizing the different subjects that are taught or connecting education to future job prospects come up often as questions. It is considered one of the easiest topics as most candidates are familiar with it. However, always remember to read the question carefully, and don't just write any answer relating to education.

Work and Careers

Work and careers are also topics that are regular in writing task 2 and they might range from opinion and discussion essays to two-part questions, due to their multiple themes. Unemployment and working from home are often found as such questions. Note that in order to write an essay on work and careers

there is some specific vocabulary that you should try to incorporate in your essays: words and phrases like interview, ambition, payroll, overtime, and job security ought to be part of your word bank.

Cities and Transport

Urban life, city problems, different types of pollution, green spaces, public places, housing issues, as well as excessive noise and rubbish are some of the topics that you might encounter, sometimes in different combinations. Transport and daily commute are also popular in IELTS exams. Those subjects can often be found in advantages and disadvantages as well as problem and solution essays, but they could be incorporated in every kind of task 2. Look at some sample questions and answers online, and ask if you could write a full response based on your knowledge and language skill.

Arts, Culture and Hobbies

Arts at school, museums and cultural heritage, monuments, and traditional/modern art sometimes combined with other interests and activities such as sport and hobbies can be also a topic in this writing task. These are probably more common in the speaking exam, but you sometimes see them in writing task 2, and you should be confident enough to present a satisfactory answer.

Environment and Nature

The protection of the environment and the natural world are very often found in IELTS as they of importance to our world. Recycling, protection of wildlife, and different types of pollution are some typical examples. Remember that this topic often overlaps others, such as science and society. Just like the work and career related topic, this one requires knowledge of specific vocabulary. You don't have to be an environmentalist to be familiar with it, but reading some articles on these matters would go a long way.

Technology and Media

New technological inventions, their influence on our lives, and their advantages and problems are recurring topics in task 2. The digital world, the internet, and people's relationships with the various social networks are pressing issues today and this is also reflected in IELTS. As a consequence, they can be found in almost every type of task, especially in "advantages and disadvantages" essays as well as discussion essays.

Human Relationships and Happiness

Personal traits, different families, communities, and their influence on people might also come up as topics, although they are rather rare. They are mostly encountered combined with other topics (like careers or education). Sometimes you may be asked to comment on what makes people happy, or the relationship between happiness and money.

Society

Regarding society and social issues, we usually encounter opinion or discussion essays. A frequent subject that might require some special care regarding the vocabulary is crime, but there are also issues relating to gender, childhood, aging, and other such areas. Society is a topic that common matches up with other topics.

Language

Academic Language

Being able to adequately use academic language is an important aspect of IELTS writing. While this might be quite easy and obvious in writing task 1 where you are presenting some kind of graph or chart and the description comes naturally as “academic”, it can become trickier in task 2 where you are much freer to express your ideas in your own words. When asked what you think, it is easy to slip into the same mode of thought that guides you in the speaking exam, but the writing exam requires certain conventions that are more academic. I advise you to read as many academic texts as possible in order to develop not only your vocabulary but also a sense of which words are suitable for an academic essay. I believe that this strategy is much more effective than trying to memorize lists of “academic vocabulary”.

It is important to know what exactly is meant by “academic language”: candidates often ask, for example, if they are allowed to use personal pronouns, such as “I” and “my”. There is no set rule about this; however, personal pronouns can make an essay sound a little less formal. Obviously, if you are asked for your opinion on an essay, you should give it. Just remember to avoid overuse of “I think...” There are also certain constructions that can be used to avoid using “I”. You can say, “This essay will argue that...” for one example.

Grammar

In the IELTS writing exam you are evaluated not only on the correct use of grammar, but also on the variety of grammatical structures that you can use efficiently to support your arguments. Below I will present you with some of the tenses and grammatical structures that are often used in those essays and any issues you might encounter while using them.

You don't actually need to know that many tenses to score highly in the writing exam, as their use is quite limited. Present simple and past simple are the most commonly occurring tenses, while present perfect may also occur. Although you can use other tenses, of course, these three will probably occur the most. Therefore, being able to use these very common tenses without error is extremely important. You should familiarize yourself with the past and present tenses and their precise uses. (All of this can be found in my book, *Grammar for IELTS Writing*.)

Regarding future tenses in IELTS writing task 2, “will” is used in most parts. In addition to will, there is another grammatical structure that can be used to speculate about future possibilities: **conditionals** are widely used in those essays so that one can speculate on possible actions and their consequences. Consequently, they are often found in cause and effects essays. For example:

- If governments don't take immediate action, climate change will permanently ruin our planet.

It might be hard to master conditionals so that you can use the right type depending on the circumstances so we advise you to practice this grammatical structure a lot.

Speaking about cause and effect essays, **modals** like “may”, “might” and “can” are very useful in describing possible outcomes, so that you don't become too absolute in expressing your opinion. These

add a subtle layer of meaning to your writing that an examiner will look upon positively. **Relative clauses** are also useful for connecting sentences and ideas and adding some extra diversity to your grammar. Be sure to use the correct punctuation in this sort of sentence, depending on whether the clause is essential or non-essential. **Passive voice**, when applicable, could be also a plus. Generally, it is required in describing a process diagram, but it also makes writing more formal and academic, and so it can be used sparingly throughout your essays.

To sum up, there are a variety of grammatical structures that you can use can improve your band score. However, you should always keep in mind that the most important thing is to be able to use grammar in a correct way, consequently when in doubt, use the grammatical structure that comes easier to you.

Vocabulary

When English is not your mother tongue, you should employ different strategies in order to be able to use as much vocabulary as possible. In order to build an extensive word bank, I advise you to read as much as possible: usually, it doesn't matter whether you read literature, essays, or news articles, as long as you become familiar with typical English expressions, collocations, and phrasal verbs. Make notes as you read, and revise them often. Look up the words in dictionaries and on Google to check for example sentences. All of these can be important in structuring your essay.

Another important feature of the language is **collocations**, meaning words that go together, like "make progress" or "save time". Collocations are different in every language and it is a common mistake among candidates to translate collocations directly from their mother tongue to English, sometimes with disastrous results. The only way to actually learn and memorize collocations is to expose yourself as much as possible to spoken and written English by reading books, watching movies in English, speaking with native speakers etc. Again, make notes and revise not by studying single words, but by studying how they naturally go together.

Like collocations, **phrasal verbs** are unique in every language and you need to immerse in the English language in order to be able to include them in your text. Phrasal verbs can be difficult to learn because the verb in the phrase may not have a meaning similar to that of the full phrases. For example, "to make out" means to hear someone or something, but you wouldn't guess that from the word "make". Note that not all phrasal verbs are appropriate to use in an academic context, as many of them are informal, or even slang. Being able to use the right phrasal verbs in your text will add some diversity in your vocabulary which will count positively in your band score.

As mentioned in the writing task 1 guide, adverbs are important to your text. They add diversity in your writing by enriching it and they make your arguments sound more convincing and your details sound more precise. You need to practice incorporating them into your writing if they don't come naturally. One of the biggest problems English learners face with adverbs is not understanding their meaning, but figuring out their placement in a sentence. Positioning an adjective is very simple, but adverbs are incredibly flexible, and their position will change depending upon whether they are single words or

longer phrases. Adverbs of frequency (often, sometimes, always) go before the verb, whereas adverbs of manner (thoughtfully, carefully, arrogantly) go at the end of a sentence.

Some Useful Words and Phrases

In this section I will present you with a vocabulary bank of useful words and expressions to connect and present ideas, to show comparison, similarity and contrast, and more. This list is by no means extensive; instead, I recommend that you add to it more vocabulary that you might encounter, so that it becomes a fuller list that you can both study while you practice and revise the day before the exam.

Consequence: This means that..., By doing this..., As a result, Consequently, This would lead to, Therefore, So, As a consequence of, Hence, Under these circumstances, In that case

Addition: In addition to, Moreover, Furthermore, Similarly, Also, Too, As well, Besides, Not only... but also, What is more

Contrast: Even so, Unless, Instead of, However, on the other hand, but, although, In spite of, Despite, Nonetheless, In contrast, In comparison

Similarity: Likewise, In common with, Also, Equally, Alike, In the same way, Correspondingly, reflect, resemble

Reason: because, due to, owing to, in order to, so that, so as to, the reason why, thanks to

Examples: Such as, That is, For instance, For example, Like, A good example of this is, A good illustration of this is, Evidence for this is provided by, In this case, Namely, In other words

Underline importance: It is important/crucial that, There is no doubt that, One cannot deny that

Conclusion: In conclusion, To sum up, To conclude, Overall, To summarize, Taking everything into consideration, On balance, In brief

General opinions/facts: Some people think that, For many, Many people believe that, Generally speaking, People argue that, according to + a group of people (for example politicians, youngsters), In many cases, In the majority of cases, It is generally said/thought/considered that

Introduce one's opinion: believe, suggest, say, think, argue, claim, in my(or their) opinion/view

Personal opinion: As I see it, I am of the opinion that, As far as I'm concerned, As far as I know, I would imagine that, I am convinced that, I am positive that, Without a doubt, I am certain that, In my personal experience, Experience has shown me that

Agree or disagree with a statement: completely agree with an idea, agree strongly with an opinion, slightly disagree with a point of view, totally disagree with a viewpoint, being able to see both sides of an argument

Double Checking

Double checking your essay can save you from countless mistakes and thus you should always leave some time at the end to actually do it. You should absolutely incorporate checking into your practice as well, so that it will have become a habit by the time you take the actual exam.

The most efficient way to check your essay is to reread it multiple times, having in mind the four criteria of your evaluation: Task Achievement, Cohesion/Cohherence, Vocabulary, and Grammar. Usually, candidates tend to focus only on the last two, forgetting things that are equally important to the final band score.

The first and most important thing to check when you reread your essay is whether you have answered all parts of the question. You have to be extra careful about this when you are given two-part question essays as well as discussion essays: in the latter, make sure that you have presented both views. After task achievement, check your essay's cohesion: does the text flow naturally or do you need to add some linking expressions? Is everything in place or does the course of thought seems kind of confusing? If the latter is true, try rearranging the order of your sentences to make it easier for the reader.

As mentioned earlier, grammar and spelling checks come naturally when you are re-reading your text. Regarding your grammar, pay special attention to the singular and plural form of nouns and verbs. In terms of vocabulary, replace some common words with more sophisticated ones but after having finished the essay because looking for this kind of word while writing will make you run out of time before you realize it. In this guide, I have stressed the importance of using academic language but it is equally fundamental that you don't overdo it: never use words unless you are 100% sure of their meaning because you might use them incorrectly and ruin the meaning.

Finally, examine your essay for repetition: replace repetitive words with synonyms, repetitive phrases with other expressions, and eliminate as much as possible concepts or arguments that are mentioned more than once (of course here the introduction and the conclusion are the exception to this rule). There are certain cases when repetition cannot be avoided, but do your best to limit this phenomenon.

Model Essays

Here you can find six model essays and a commentary below each one, where the structure and the course of thought behind them are discussed. They are not to be models in the sense that you ought to copy them, but they should rather serve you in examining how a complete essay could possibly look. These are just a few ways that an excellent essay could be written, but keep in mind that there are many possible ways to do it.

Essay #1

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

The invention of smartphones has had only positive effects on people's everyday lives. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Nowadays, smartphones are everywhere. Their sales are increasing every year and it seems like everyone uses them. Some people believe that our everyday lives have only benefited from this invention, by allowing us to go online almost anytime and providing us with a small computer in our pocket. I mostly disagree with this statement for the reasons I will explain below.

In my opinion, smartphones have led modern people to poor social interaction, in contrast to claiming that they keep us connected by being able to go online anytime. One can often observe people who are gathered around a table only to look at their phone screens and scroll online, instead of actually speaking to each other. This was not the case before the invention and rapid spread of smartphone use among people. Now what once was considered everyday human interaction has become increasingly scarce.

Secondly, smartphones can cause a lot of health issues to their users. Apart from radiofrequency energy, constant exposure to their blue light can lead to sleep deprivation. In addition to physical health issues, users might also experience mental health problems by developing addiction. According to scientific research, being able to check your mail and social media on your phone whenever you want can lead you to developing a fear that you will miss something and consequently checking all the time, resulting in getting addicted to interacting with the device.

Overall, smartphones are currently in everyone's hands in order to communicate and have instant access to information online. Although they are undoubtedly useful to people's everyday lives, we should not overlook their drawbacks. Instead we ought to find ways to overcome them.

Word count: 278

Commentary

This task with the topic of smartphones presented us with a statement, asking for the candidate's opinion. Therefore, the text was structured following the model of the opinion essay. In the introduction, I paraphrased the statement and stated my disagreement. The two main body paragraphs supported the thesis by giving two different reasons (lack of social interaction and health deterioration), expanding upon them by giving examples. In the conclusion, I restated the topic and reminded the reader about my view on the subject.

Essay #2

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Some people think that music, dance, and arts classes are very important at school, while others believe that more emphasis should be given to language and maths classes.

Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

For as long as there has been an educational system, people have argued over the various merits of the different subjects. There are the ones who believe that artistic classes are crucial for a child's development and thus should be given more emphasis and others who state that language and maths classes are more useful to a child's education. In my opinion, finding a balance between both areas is the key. In this essay I will discuss both views and present you with my opinion.

Firstly, artistic classes have been underestimated for years and this fact has rendered school education mundane. Other than bringing more fun into schools, scientific research has proved that engaging with the arts at a young age assists the development of creativity and imagination. Those skills turn children and teenagers into dynamic and individual thinkers when they become adults. In addition to this, artistic

classes help children and teenagers express their thoughts and feelings and consequently contribute to better mental health

On the other hand, language and maths classes are undoubtedly useful in a person's life and this becomes obvious by their alternative naming as "core skills". School is generally responsible for cultivating those skills in children, as opposed to art skills that can also be acquired in extracurricular classes. Moreover, language and math skills are very important for many job sectors such as banking and engineering and thus acquiring them provides a person with more work opportunities.

To conclude, I believe that both arts and core subjects are equally important to a child's development. Education systems ought to find a balance between the different subjects so that children become both creative and able of analytical thinking later in life.

Word count: 283

Commentary

From the question we can easily understand that we are asked for a discussion essay on a topic that concerns education. Except for presenting both views, we are asked to give our personal opinion on the subject. In this case, I chose to present my opinion about balancing between the two different views in the introduction. After that, I dedicated one paragraph to each type of subject, beginning with the art classes and their advantages and continuing with maths and language and what they can provide for children. I presented three arguments for each case to keep it even in order to support our balanced view. In the conclusion, I repeated my thesis in a different way to remind the reader where I stand on the subject.

Essay #3

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

An increasing numbers of big cities around the world are turning their centers into pedestrian zones.
What are the advantages and the disadvantages of this?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

A new trend of transforming city centers into car-free zones has emerged in cities all around the globe. This development of turning roads and parking spaces into pedestrian zones has been met both with approval and complaint by the cities' residents. This essay will examine both the advantages and disadvantages of pedestrianisation.

One of the most apparent benefits of pedestrian zones is the low levels of car use, due to which there are much less atmospheric emissions and consequently lower environmental pollution. Additionally, another advantage is the creation of more green areas and social spaces, as parks and playgrounds emerge where parking and roads once were. Those spaces encourage citizens to be active by walking and cycling instead of driving their cars to the city centers.

However, no development comes without any drawbacks. The creation of pedestrian zones can create traffic congestion in other parts of the city, blocking bigger road arteries and causing serious problems to the residents' daily commute. Shopkeepers of the city center may also be critical of the car free zones, as their clients are experiencing increased difficulty accessing the shops. What is more, pedestrianisation reduces parking space, which can also become a problem in cities that do not have the infrastructure to tackle this problem efficiently.

In brief, pedestrian zones come with both benefits and problems for a city's community. Given the rapid expansion of this trend, the authorities should take into account both the advantages and disadvantages of car free zones in order to create such zones in an effective way, minimizing the possible damage.

Word count: 261

Commentary

Seeing the question we immediately become aware of the fact that we need to write an advantage and disadvantage essay. What we should be careful about in this case is that we are not asked about our opinion and thus we are not supposed to give it. Consequently, I wrote an objective essay, giving even space to the advantages and the drawbacks. In the introduction, I presented the topic of pedestrianisation, saying that it comes with advantages and disadvantages and also stated what this essay will examine. Moving on, the main body paragraphs were dedicated to presenting objectively both the benefits and drawbacks of car free zones. As a result, I wrote one paragraph with three advantages (no pollution, more spaces, and active lifestyle) and another with three drawbacks (traffic, no access to shops, and lack of parking spaces). I didn't make use of examples because I gave enough reasons. In the end I restated the problem and gave a recommendation about the future creation of pedestrian zones.

Essay #4

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Nowadays, car congestion is becoming an ever-increasing problem in many areas. What are the causes and the effects of this?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Traffic problems have already become the biggest concern in many countries in the world, with more and more citizens facing car congestion daily, especially on their way to work. While this phenomenon is complex, this essay will try to examine both the roots and effects of car congestion.

To begin with, traffic congestion is a direct outcome of the increase in car sales. More and more people buy their own car in order to make their daily commute faster and more comfortable and consequently a greater number of cars flood the streets. Another reason for car congestion is the increasing separation between residential and work areas. People live and work in different parts of the city and they have to cover great distances every day which requires the use of a car. Cars become even more indispensable when the public transport network is not adequate and unable to cover the residents' needs.

Traffic congestion has multiple effects on both individuals and the environment. Firstly, wasted fuel in traffic jams contributes to the increase of air pollution and the emissions of carbon dioxide. Secondly, individuals experience both delays in their daily schedule and the inability to predict commute time, facts that can lead to frustration and possibly reduced mental health in the long term. Lastly, traffic jams have become a big problem for emergency vehicles and, for instance, ambulances have a hard time getting to their destinations where they are urgently needed.

To sum up, car congestion is an increasing problem in modern societies, created by multiple causes and having many negative effects on both the residents of those areas and the environment. Governments should take measures to tackle this issue as soon as possible.

Word count: 284

Commentary

This task was asking for a cause and effect essay and it was treated in this manner. After introducing the subject of traffic problems in the first paragraph, I listed three causes of car congestion in the second paragraph as well as three effects of the phenomenon in the third paragraph. I followed this structure in

order to give even space to both causes and effects, although I could also have given just one cause and one effect, and spent more time explaining them. In the end, I concluded by restating the problem of traffic jams and adding a sentence about what should be done in the future.

Essay #5

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Many people believe that competitiveness is a positive quality. How far do you agree with this statement? How does competitiveness affect individuals?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Nowadays, when it comes to personal traits, being competitive is considered an advantage by many. It is said that competitive people are the ones who set high standards and goals and make big efforts to achieve them, becoming more successful in the long run. I mostly disagree with this statement and in this essay I will explain the reasons as well as the effects that competitiveness has on people.

To begin with, I believe that competitiveness as a personal characteristic does more harm than good in a community of people. It promotes rivalry rather than cooperation and discourages people from social interaction and sharing, things that are very crucial to the progress of society. Moreover, competitiveness excludes introverted and modest individuals that might be discouraged from the spirit of competition around them, resulting in their exclusion from various groups.

Other than groups of people, individuals are also affected by competitiveness. Comparing yourself constantly to other people can cause stress and anxiety to those with low self-esteem. It can also lead eventually to frustration and even depression, as one is persuaded to believe that he or she is not talented or hardworking enough. On the other hand, some people are encouraged by competitiveness, which helps them to find a motivation to try harder.

To conclude, in my opinion competitiveness has negative effects in the majority of cases, both for individuals and for society as a whole. There is no doubt that there are exceptions to this rule, but I think that the unfavorable consequences of competitiveness should make us reconsider whether it is actually a positive quality.

Word count: 266

Commentary

This task contained two questions, making it clear from the beginning that it is the two-part question type. Here, it combined the opinion essay with the cause and effect essay, but the latter having only the effect part. I structured the essay accordingly, giving even space to the two questions. In the introduction I rephrased what the task was asking by explaining why competitiveness is supposed to be a positive quality and then I presented my thesis and the structure that the essay would follow. The second paragraph contained the arguments in support of my thesis that disagreed with the initial statement of the tasks. In the third paragraph I answered the second question that was referring to the effects of competitiveness on the individuals. Here, I also gave an example of the opposite view, with competitiveness being a positive trait in order not to appear too narrow-minded and present all the views. On the contrary, in the conclusion I restated where I stand on the subject. It is crucial that you clearly state your opinion in a two-part essay if you are asked about it: sometimes answering the second question makes you forget that you have to be unambiguous about it and it is a good strategy to remember to always restate what you think in the conclusion.

Essay #6

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

More and more people travel to tourist destinations during public holidays every year. What problems does this cause? What solutions are there to these problems?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

A growing number of people each year choose to visit tourist destinations during public holidays. This phenomenon creates some unpleasant situations that concern both people and the environment. In this essay I will explore the problems that come with this trend and suggest solutions to these problems.

To start with, the tendency to go to tourist places at the same time results in a big number of people that concentrate in one place. Usually a large crowd results in an increased amount of cars which creates traffic problems in those destinations, a frustration to both tourists and permanent residents. Another problem that arises with the temporary population rise is the piles of garbage that are found everywhere, as the bins are often not adequate for the waste produced by all those people.

In order to deal with those urgent issues in the touristic areas, there are a number of solutions that can be implemented. Firstly, car congestion can be tackled by using alternative road networks or if those don't exist, by planning to build better road infrastructure. More bins are also a solution to the excessive waste that is produced during the tourist period. Additionally, a campaign could be organized by the authorities that would inform both residents and tourists about the trash collection schedule, in order to avoid the big garbage piles that are waiting to be picked up.

In conclusion, many issues arise with the wave of people that visit tourist destinations during public holidays, such as traffic congestion and excessive garbage. Both problems can be overcome by better planning, regarding the roads and the number of bins as well as by information campaigns led by the local authorities.

Word count: 281

Commentary

The task above seems like a two-part question at first glance, but if observed more attentively, we notice that it is a typical problem and solution essay. We are asked to present both the problems of people visiting tourist places in the holidays and the solution to those. I presented this issue in the introduction along with the content that this essay will have. I chose to group the problems together in one paragraph and the solutions in another, although it would be also acceptable to group every problem together with its solution in each paragraph. After having illustrated the solutions to every problem presented, I repeated in brief what I said in the essay in the conclusion, using different words.

Extra Tips

One of the biggest concerns IELTS students have in taking the writing exam is having enough time to finish task 2. It is true that it can be very challenging, taking into account that finishing the previous task in time is a prerequisite to have 40 minutes to complete task 2. Having a plan of how you manage the time given is the key to succeeding in this task. Below I have mapped out a possible model plan. It is by no means necessary that you follow this exact timing for each section, as you might find out that for you it is easier to write the main body paragraphs compared to brainstorming in the beginning and thus you need to modify your time management to your own needs. Whichever time management you decide on, it is crucial that you try to follow the same plan every time that you write an essay. Time management is essential in your practice, in order to build specific habits that you will adhere to in the exam day.

Time Management Plan (40 minutes)

- Read the question, brainstorm and make a plan: 10 minutes
- Write the introduction 4 minutes
- Write the second paragraph 9 minutes
- Write the third paragraph 9 minutes
- Write the conclusion 3 minutes
- Double checking 5 minutes

In order to improve your performance in time management, you need to observe your timing and practice a lot. For beginners, I propose the following timing practice: pick a writing task, set a limit, and stop after 40 minutes. Then observe your text and see where you spent most of the time: was it planning, writing the introduction, the main body paragraphs, or correcting your mistakes? Do this more than one time in order to get the most accurate results possible. Then, note down in which sections you need to perform more efficiently and focus on writing them faster next time. If you are consistently slow in a specific part of your essay, practicing it individually can also help: for instance, if you spend too much time on introduction, practice writing only introductions for some time, until you are able to write them in the right time frame (probably around 4 minutes) that you have set for the introduction.

A lot of candidates get panicked about not having enough ideas to fill the essay. While what is called “writer’s block” is very rare, if you are worried about not having ideas, you should try to build a bank of them from other essays. Reading model essays helps you understand many views on a particular subject and you can later use some of the arguments in your essays. This is especially applicable to topics like

the environment or unemployment. Building a bank of ideas will also increase your self-confidence and thus reduce your chance to have a creative block on the exam day.

As I mentioned previously, in the guide for writing task 1, in order to save time while counting the words you should get familiar with how many of your words fit in one line and then count the lines and multiply. Do not overlook the word amount because there will be a penalty in your band score if you don't manage to reach the minimum limit of 250 words. You should also avoid going too far over the word limit, as this will likely cause you to make more mistakes, and thus reduce your chances of scoring a band 7 (where only 3 grammatical errors are permitted). It is better to spend this time editing your essay.

In the event that the time limit is approaching and you haven't finished your essay yet, spend your last minutes writing a conclusion. Failing to do so will result in a very low band score in the "task achievement" criteria, something to avoid at any cost. Giving one less reason to support your thesis won't make such a difference, so concentrate on completing the task. Conclusions are easy to write after a little practice, and using those final minutes to conclude your essay could save you from a low score.

If you find yourself in the situation of not being able to surpass the word limit, a good strategy is to give more examples. Not only will they provide you with extra words without repeating yourself, but examples will also make your arguments more articulated and convincing. You don't always have to draw your examples from your own experience or reality. Nobody will fact-check whether your examples are real as long as you make them believable.

In any case, both while writing and while checking try not to get diverted from the main topic of the essay and instead focus on answering the question in a clear and accurate way. There is nothing more important than being able to respond to the task and this is something that you should keep in mind both while you are practicing and on the actual exam day.