

Different Types of Process Question

There are generally two different types of process question: natural and man-made.

Natural processes include things like the life cycle of a butterfly or frog, pregnancy, the water cycle or how cows produce milk.

You might also be asked to describe a man-made process like how coffee, tea, beer or wine are made, how cement or bricks are produced or how an ATM or the internet works.

It does not matter if it is man-made or a natural process. The same skills and system we use to answer process questions are the same for both.

Writing Task 1 Process Questions: 5 Step Plan

To understand the task and quickly make a plan to answer process questions you should follow the 7 steps below:

1. Understand the process. Find the start and the end of the process. Count how many stages there are and understand what each stage does and the relationship it has with the stage before and after it.
2. Paraphrase the question.

3. Describe what is happening generally in 2 sentences. This is your overview paragraph and I will show you how to write this in more detail below.
4. Divide the process in two and write two separate paragraphs detailing each stage of the process.
5. Check your work.

Understand the Process

One of the most challenging things about these questions is having to write about something you have never seen or heard of before.

Don't worry, try to remember two things.

First, the examiner knows that you have probably never seen this process before and you have only 20 minutes to write about it. They do not expect a perfect answer. Just pick out the main features and report them accurately.

Second, you can quickly understand any process by asking yourself these questions:

1. Where does the process start and where does it end?
2. How many stages are there?
3. Is it a man-made process or natural process?

4. Is it a cyclical (in a circle) or linear (one start point and one end point) process?
5. Are there any materials that need to be added to the process?
6. What is produced?
7. What does each stage of the process do?
8. What are the relationships between each stage?

The processes you will be asked to write about in the IELTS test will not be very complicated and you should be able to easily answer all of the questions above. When you do this you will completely understand what is happening and you will be able to start writing your answer.

Paraphrase the Question

Every process question follows the same format. First, it tells you some general information about the process and then it instructs you to 'Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features.'

For example, the question above states:

***The diagram below shows the process of photosynthesis.
(General information)***

Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features. (Instructions)

The first thing we need to do in every question is to paraphrase the general information. Paraphrasing is one of the most important IELTS skills to master. We paraphrase a sentence by rewriting it so that the words are different but the meaning stays the same. There are a few different ways we can do this but the easiest way is to use synonyms and change the word order of the sentence. Synonyms are different words that have the same meaning, for example, woman and female.

Let's look at the questions above and paraphrase them.

Question 1: The diagram below shows the process of photosynthesis.

Paraphrased: The illustration demonstrates how plants produce energy from sunlight.

Question 2: The diagram below shows how electricity is produced in a nuclear power station.

Paraphrased: The illustration below shows the process of how nuclear power plants make electricity.

Every time you see an Academic Task 1 question rewrite the question and this should be your first paragraph. We can now move on and write our next paragraph; the overview.

Overview of Process

The overview is probably the most important paragraph in the whole essay. If you do not write an overview it is extremely difficult to get a high mark in IELTS Task 1, however, if you learn how to write a good one, you are far more likely to get the score you deserve.

Overviews for process questions can be done quite easily by asking yourself a few questions. The answers to these questions will allow you to form 2 overview sentences.

1. Is it a man-made or natural process?
2. How many stages are there?
3. What is produced?
4. Where does it start and where does it end?
5. Is it cyclical or linear?
6. Are any materials added?

You might not be able to answer all of these for each process question, but you will always be able to answer enough of them to be able to write a good overview.

Detail Each Stage of the Process

Now that we have paraphrased the question and provided an overview we need to tell the examiner about each stage in more detail.

You can:

- say what each stage does
- what it produces
- if any materials are added
- and/or discuss the relationship with the previous or subsequent stages.

Sequencing the Process

Try to sequence your language and make your details easier to read by using language like:

- Firstly
- First of all
- Secondly
- After that

Today we will look at a process diagram, featuring the life cycle of the silkworm and the production of silk cloth.

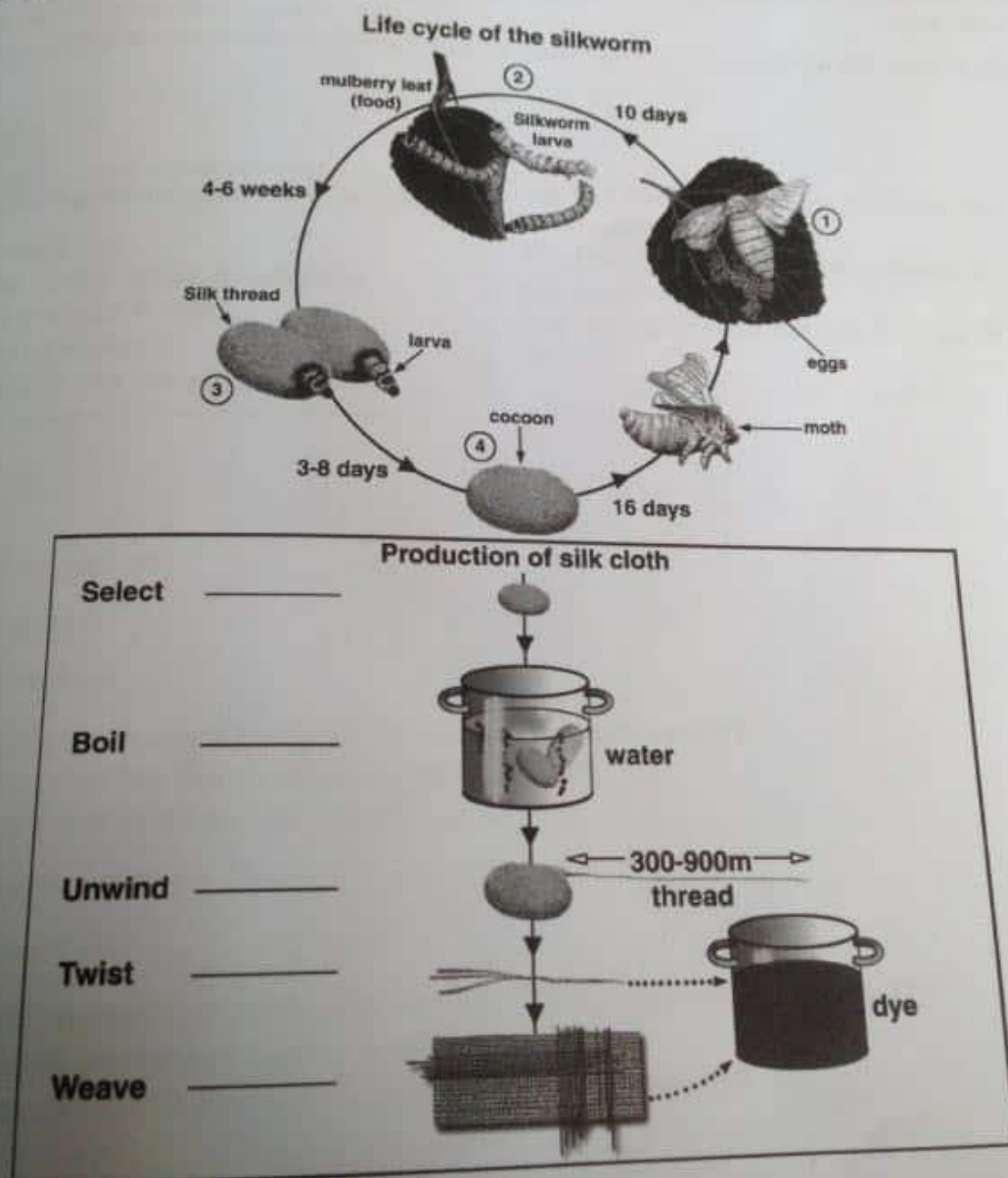
WRITING TASK 1

You should spend about 20 minutes on this task.

The diagrams below show the life cycle of the silkworm and the stages in the production of silk cloth.

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

Write at least 150 words.



This question is interesting because it has two different stages and this will affect our answer structure and grammar.

With this kind of question I would use the following structure:

Paragraph 1

Sentence 1- Paraphrase Question

We simply take the question and use synonyms to paraphrase it. The examiner will be looking for your ability to do this in the exam.

Paragraph 2

Sentence 1- Overview of stage 1

Sentence 2- Overview of stage 2

Write two general things about the diagram. You could include such things as how many stages there are, the outcomes, the beginning and the end, if it is a natural or man-made process or if the process is cyclical or linear.

Paragraph 3

Sentence 1- Details of stage 1

Sentence 2- Details of stage 1

Sentence 3- Details of stage 1

Take the general statement you made in paragraph 2 and support them with details from the diagram. Remember to only use the information you can see in the diagram. Do not draw conclusions or give your opinion. Repeat with the next paragraph.

Paragraph 4

Sentence 1- Details of stage 2

Sentence 2- Details of stage 2

Sentence 3- Details of stage 2

Grammar- The Passive

When describing any of the chart questions you shouldn't use the passive, but when describing a process you may have to.

However, the passive is only used to describe man-made processes. If you are given a natural process you should use the active, rather than the passive.

Therefore, in this answer, I will use the active to describe the life cycle and use the passive to describe the manufacture of silk.

Sample Answer

The graphic illustrates the life process of the silkworm and the phases in the manufacture of silk material.

Overall, the lifecycle is a natural process and contains four cyclical phases, beginning with the laying of eggs and ending with the birth of a new moth from a cocoon. The production of silk is, in contrast to the previous stage, a man-made linear process comprising of 6 main stages.

To begin with, eggs are produced by the moth and it takes 10 days for the eggs to hatch into silkworm larvae that feed on mulberry leaves. This stage takes between 4 and 6 weeks before the worms construct a cocoon from silk thread, taking approximately one week. They stay there for around a fortnight, subsequently emerging as moths and the process can begin again.

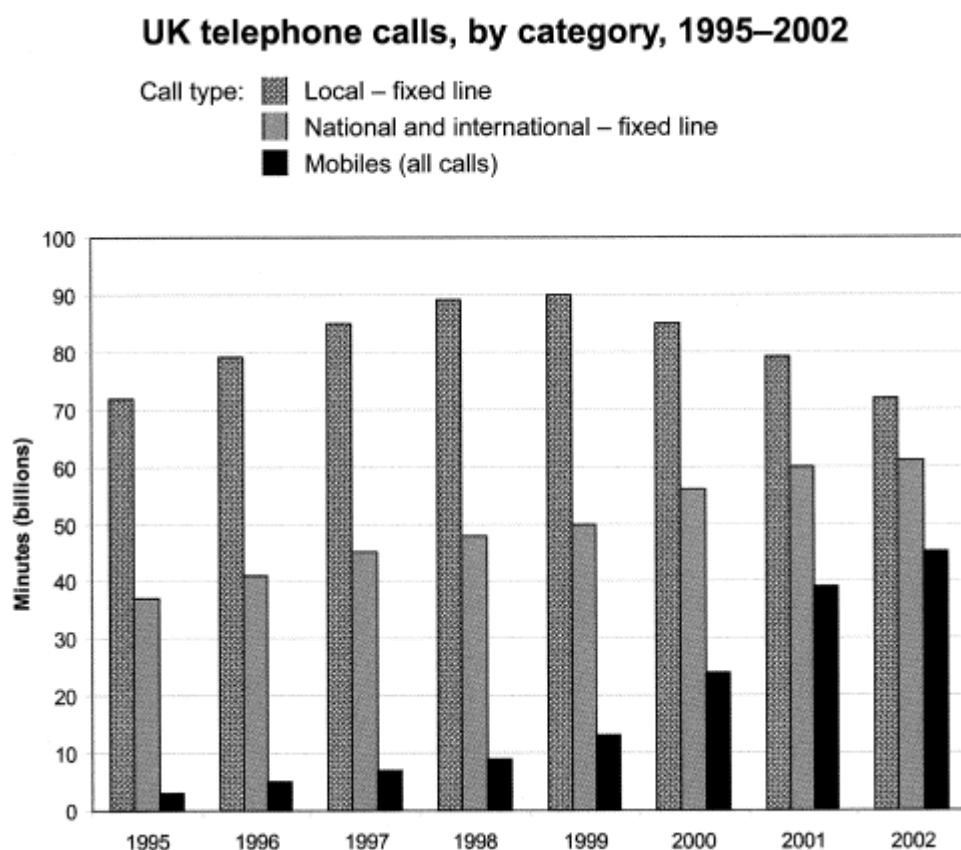
The first stage in the manufacture of silk is the selection of cocoons and these are then boiled. Once boiled, the silk thread is unwound to a length of between 300 and 900 meters. Finally, the silk can be twisted and weaved into cloth before being dyed.

(180 words)

Here is a band 9 sample answer for you and a question analysis.

Question: The chart below shows the total number of minutes (in billions) of telephone calls in the UK, divided into three categories, from 1995-2002.

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



Source: Cambridge English IELTS Past Papers.

Answer

The bar graph shows the combined time spent in billions of minutes, on three different kinds of phone calls in the United Kingdom, from 1995-2002.

Overall, local calls were the most popular over the whole period, with national and international calls and calls on mobiles second and third respectively. However, the number of minutes spent on international and national calls and mobiles both increased over the period, with mobile minutes increasing dramatically, thus narrowing the gap between the three categories by 2002.

Minutes spent on local calls fluctuated over the period, with just over 70 billion minutes in 1995, peaking at approximately 90 billion in 1999 and then steadily decreasing to just over 70 billion minutes in 2002.

National and international calls increased steadily year on year, from just under 40 billion minutes in 1995 to a peak of just over 60 billion in 2002. Mobile minutes increased rapidly from approximately 3 billion in 1995 to around 45 billion in 2002. Mobile phone usage nearly doubled from approximately 22 billion minutes in 2000 to 40 billion in 2001.

You will notice that there are four paragraphs in this answer, each with a purpose. I advise all of my students to use this four-paragraph structure.

Let's look at it in more detail.

Paragraph 1

Paraphrase question. This should be one sentence only, and it is how you should start all of your essays. Paraphrasing is just writing the sentence again to have the same meaning but with different words. See my post on **how to paraphrase** for more detailed information on how to do this.

In this example, I have changed phrases like 'total number of minutes' to 'combined time spent' and 'divided into three categories' to 'three different kinds'.

Paragraph 2

In this paragraph, we outline the general trends or most noticeable general things about the chart. This is our overview, and the examiner will be looking for this. It isn't easy to get a high band score without one. Notice that I have not included any numbers in this paragraph and used very general language to show what is happening.

Overall, local calls remain the most popular, despite a bit of fluctuation, and the other two also show a general increase. We are not looking at what happens between years in this paragraph; instead, we take a very broad view of the data. In the next two paragraphs, we can then describe these general trends in more detail.

Paragraphs 3 and 4

These paragraphs are our details paragraphs, and it is here that we describe the general trends. This is where we have to use the data.

You will notice that I have taken the **first** sentence in paragraph **2** and described it in more detail in paragraph **3**.

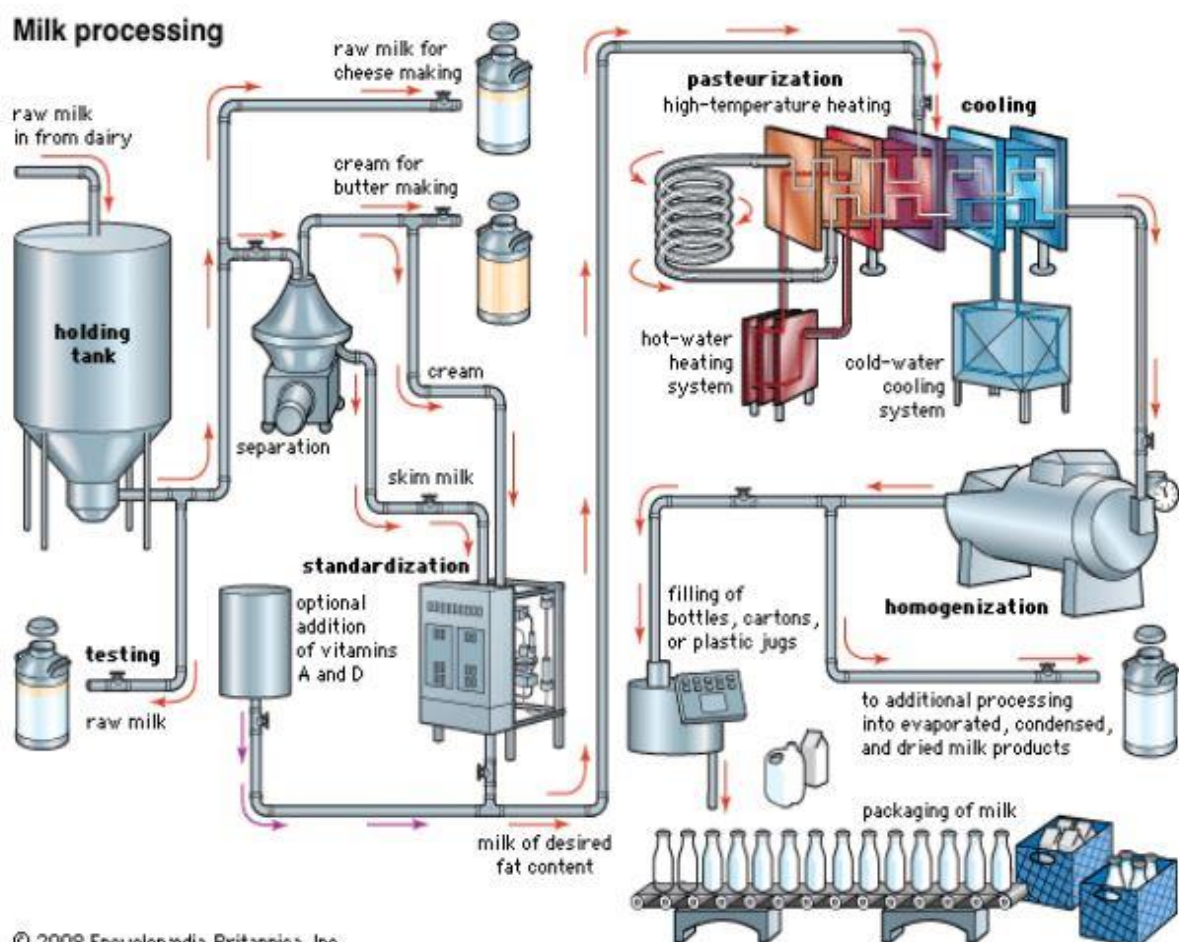
Then I have taken the **second** sentence from paragraph **2** and described it in more detail in paragraph **4**. This is a very logical way to order the information, will boost your marks for coherence and cohesion and make it easier for you to organise your thoughts and save time in the essay.

Writing Task

Read the question below and write an essay/interpretation of the graph/Diagram/Pie Chart/Map.

Write at least 150 words

The diagram below shows the process of milk production. Summarize the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.



Set1 30th August

Part1

What do you think about computers?
What are the benefits of a computer for children?
What are the benefits of being a student?
How do traffic problems affect you?
What traffic problems are there in your area?
How do most people travel to work where you live?
What is the most popular means of transportation in your country?

Part 2

Describe a leisure activity near/on the sea that you want to try.

You should say:

what it is
what you need to prepare
how easy or difficult it is
and explain why you want to try it.

Part 3

What kinds of leisure activities can you do in a place near the water?
Why do many people like spending time in the sea?
What are the important things that should be remembered when participating in an outdoor recreational activity?
What are the advantages and disadvantages of vacations to the seaside?
Do you think water activities help in achieving the true nature of recreation? Why?

Set2- 27th August

Part1

Where are you living now?
Is it a good area to live in?
What do you like most about where you live?
What is the neighborhood like where you live?
Do you have any friends there?
What can be improved in the area that you live?
Do you know any famous people in the area that you live in?
Do you intend to stay in this area in the future?

Part2

Describe an activity you usually do that wastes your time

You should say:

what it is
when you usually do it
why you do it
and explain why you think it wastes your time.

Part3

How do you balance life and work?

Will you continue doing something when you are aware that it's a waste of time?
What kinds of things make people feel pressured?
Why do some people refuse to abide by rules?

Set 3 7th August

Part1

What do you think about computers?
What are the benefits of a computer for children?
What are the benefits of being a student?
How do traffic problems affect you?
What traffic problems are there in your area?
How do most people travel to work where you live?
What is the most popular means of transportation in your country?

Part2

Describe a skill that was difficult for you to learn

You should say:
what it is
when you learned it
why you learned it
and explain why you think it is difficult for you.

Part3

What skills do primary students need to master?
Is it hard for students to learn new skills?
Why is it hard for adults to learn a new skill?
Is a teacher important to students' learning experience? Why?

Set 4 14th August

Part1

Do you like talking to people?
How do you like spending time with your friends?
Would you prefer to study alone or with others?
Do you remember a time when you need to cooperate with others?
Have you been to a new place recently?
What's the difference between this place and other places of the same kind?
Do you feel nervous when you travel to new places?

Part2

Describe a piece of equipment that is important in your home.

You should say:
what you use it for
how you got it
with whom you use it
and explain why it is important.

Part3

What kinds of appliances are there in people's homes in your country?

How do you think modern technology has changed the way we work and live?

Do you think it is important to train employees to use equipment at work?

Do you think that older people have difficulties in using modern equipment?

How can we help older people to use this modern equipment?

Are there any disadvantages of using modern equipment too much in the home?