



Graph Description

A basic writing skill for “Findings” in academic papers

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I. Importance of graph description in academic writing

A common research paper consists of 8 basic sections: (1) abstract, (2) introduction, (3) literature review, (4) methodology (or experiments), (5) **findings** (or results), (6) discussion, (7) conclusion, and (8) references (see the sample research paper by Chan and Hu 2008). Graph description is related to the section of findings, where researchers often present their data in graphs, or tables, or charts and provide a description to highlight the major trends. Graph description is a basic and important skill in academic writing.

The paragraph below is Paragraph 24 of the research paper by Chan and Hu (2008).

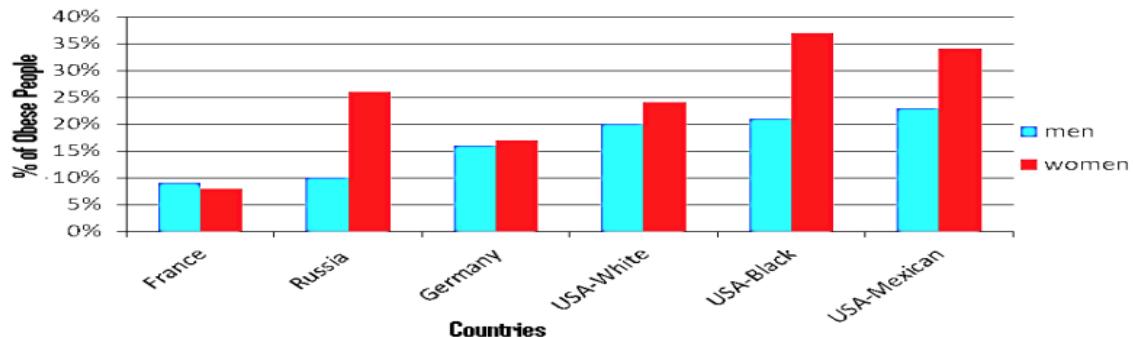
Table 1 below summarizes the participants' perceptions of child A and child B in terms of possessions. The results of paired-sample t-tests showed that the possessions attributed to child A and child B differed significantly except for the marbles. The t-values ranged from -8.2 to 16.4. Seven of the eight t-values were significant at 0.01 level. Child A was most frequently perceived to own computer (87%), a Gameboy (68%), a remote control car (58%) and Lego blocks (51%). In contrast, participants did not expect that child B would own these toys (perceived ownership ranging from 10 to 30%). Child B was more frequently expected to own a book (75%), rope (64%), a badminton bat (55%) and marbles (40%). Overall, child A was perceived as owning branded goods as well as electronic goods. Child B was perceived as owning books and sports-related toys. The participants' expectations differed for seven of the eight selected possessions. As a result, H1 was supported.

(Source: Chan, K. & Hu, F. (2008). Attitudes toward material possessions among Chinese children. *Young Consumers*, 9 (1), 49-59.)

II. Understanding graphs

Task 1: Describing a bar graph

Graph: Percentage of obese population



(1) Use 10-15 minutes to write a description of the graph.

(2) List the questions and problems you have in the process of this description. Discuss these questions in class.

(3) Compare your description with a sample essay provided.

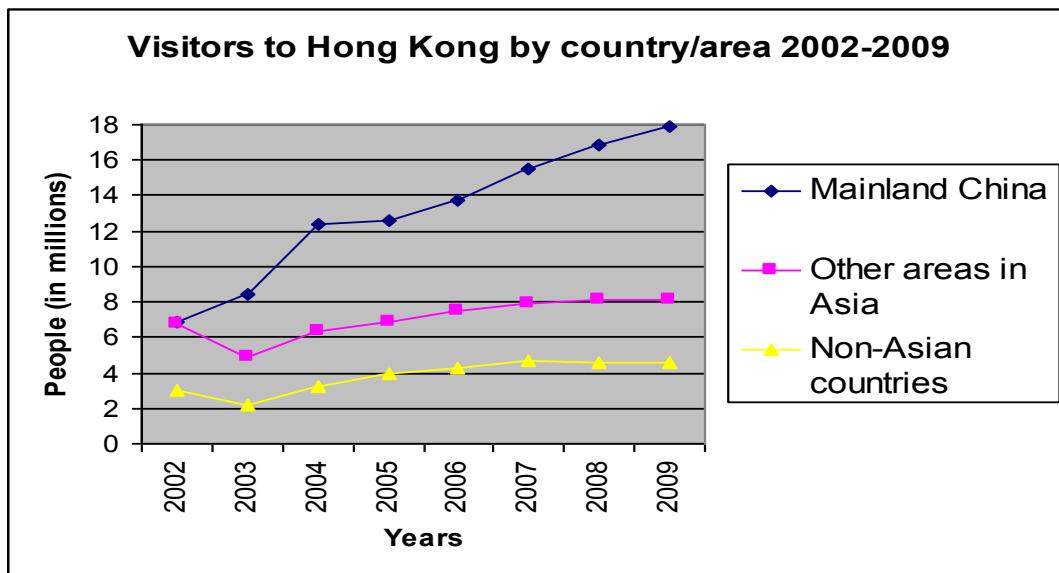
Your description for Task 1

Your questions/problems in writing this description

Task 2: Describing a line graph

See if you understand this line graph by answering these questions, then check your answers with your neighbor.

Graph: Visitors to Hong Kong by country/area 2002-2009



Compiled from two sources: http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_807/transport.pdf
<http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2007/html/W2437E.HTM> (Figures for 2009 are extrapolated)

Questions

- (1) What is this graph about?
- (2) What does the x-axis (the horizontal one) represent? In what increments?
- (3) What does the y-axis (the vertical one) represent? In what increments?
- (4) What are the main trends or patterns?

Now read a sample text below and answer the questions which follow.

A sample essay for Task 2

This graph shows the number of travelers from various parts of the world entering Hong Kong for the years from 2002 to 2009. It can clearly be seen that there was a large increase in the number of mainland Chinese visitors, while the number of visitors from Asia as well as other areas of the world rose slightly.

The numbers of mainland Chinese visiting Hong Kong rose considerably over this time period. In 2002 there were nearly 7 million mainland Chinese visitors, similar to the figure for other parts of Asia and just over double that for non-Asian travelers. This number climbed to approximately 8 million in 2003, then rose dramatically by 4 million to just over 12 million only one year later. Since 2004 there was a steady increase, with around 18 million mainland Chinese travelers visiting Hong Kong in 2009. This number was more than double that of other visitors from Asia, and around four times the figures for non-Asian visitors.

The figures for travelers from other parts of the world show similar trends: first a dip of roughly one-third the total number of visitors from 2002 to 2003, then slow growth until 2007 followed by a leveling out. Overall, the numbers of Asian tourists rose by 1 million from just under 7 million in 2002 to roughly 8 million seven years later, while the corresponding figures for visitors from non-Asian parts of the world were roughly 3 million and 4.5 million respectively.

To sum up, from 2002 to 2009 Hong Kong had become an increasingly popular place for visitors, especially people from mainland China who outnumbered those from all other parts of the world combined in 2009. (280 words)

Questions about the sample essay for Task 2

(5) What information has been included in the first paragraph?

- a. In the first sentence?
- b. In the second sentence?

(6) What information is contained in the two middle paragraphs, and how are they ordered?

(7) What kind of information is found in the concluding paragraph?

(8) In the text, which verb tenses are used, and why?

- a. In the introductory sentence?
- b. In the second sentence of the introduction?
- c. In paragraphs 2 & 3?
- d. In the final paragraph?

(9) In the text, find the synonyms that are used for these words/phrases. Can you think of any other synonyms that would have the same meaning?

- a. visitors
- b. The phrase 'the number of'

(10) Why are the reasons for the dip in 2003 and the large increase in the number of mainland Chinese travelers not given in the text?

III. Structure of graph description

Introduction paragraph

(consisting of two parts: (1) an opening sentence explaining what the graph is about and (2) one or two sentences describing the overall trend)

Body paragraph 1

(first main fact and supporting details relating to overall trend)

Body paragraph 2

(second main fact and supporting details relating to overall trend)

Concluding paragraph

(a brief summary of the most important information you perceive from the data)

Note: the number of body paragraph depends on the number of main ideas/major trends in the graph.

IV. Steps in writing a graph description

To complete the task of graph description successfully, there are two steps to take.

1. **Understanding graphic information (graphs / tables / charts / diagrams).** Take the bar graph as an example. First of all, you need to look at the graph carefully and make sure you get the facts right. Normally, there are two axes in a bar graph. You need to demonstrate you know what the two axes represent. Second, you should try to notice and highlight trends.

Whenever there are two graphs to be described, or one graph plus one table/pie chart, you should realize that they are related in some way. In this case, you need to observe the data and try to find out the relationships between them. In the conclusion, you need to indicate whether there is a correlation between them (see Task 8 and Task 9).

2. **Organizing ideas.** You should not describe every detail of the graphic information. Only the important features of the graph should be included in your description. For this reason, you should organize the data before writing. In this process, you need to decide what to include and what to put aside, what is the focus and what is mentioned incidentally. Also you should decide what information should be described first and what next so that your descriptive text can show a logical line of description of data.

Usually, data about trends and comparisons are important and should be included. It should be noted that you should not include information that is not given in the graph, because such information is considered irrelevant. In particular, you should not give any explanation of the reasons for the trends.

V. Language for writing a graph description

5.1 Useful expressions for describing graphs

Starting the essay

This graph shows/describes/summarizes/presents/compares/contrasts/illustrates/is about ...

Describing the general trend (usually the second sentence in the introduction paragraph)

- Overall/in general, there is an upward trend in...
- The major trend in this graph is ...
- There are two major trends.

Concluding the essay

- In conclusion/in summary, there is a correlation between the two graphs.
- To conclude/to sum up/ to summarize, ...
- What conclusion can be drawn from all the above is ...
- All the evidence supports/confirms/points out a conclusion that ...

Expressing time

- since 1999
- for nearly/just over/more than ten years
- between 1994 and 1997
- during the period 1994 to 1997
- by the year 2050
- in the meantime

Some example sentences which describe data

1) About increase, decrease etc.

- There was a significant (great/moderate/slight) increase/rise in the price in 2012.
- The number of college students increased/rose dramatically (greatly/moderately) in 2012.
- There was a steep (dramatic/moderate/slight) drop/decrease in the price in 2012.
- The number of college students decreased/dropped dramatically (rapidly/moderately) in 2012.
- The production has remained stable/constant in the past two years.
- The iPhone sales reached a peak in 2014.
- The price fell to its lowest level in 2014

2) About percentage etc.

- The unemployment rate in Greece was nearly 26% last year.
- Around 20% of women in this city had a college qualification last year.
- The college tuition this year is almost three times higher than it was 15 years ago.
- Young people from broken families were 2.5 times more likely to suffer depression.
- Since 2012, the internet user number has doubled to 63 million.

3) About comparison

- The difference between the two groups of data is significant.
- There is a significant difference between the two groups of data.
- 63% of the white Americans were overweight or obese last year, while the overweight rate for Black adults was 73%.
- 70% of the science majors in this university were males in 1990 and there were only 30% of female science students.
- The female unemployment rate is 8.3% this year, which is higher than the male rate of 5.9%.

- The production grew rapidly in 2012, but fell considerably in 2013.
- The production showed a marginal rise in 2012, but then suffered a sharp drop in 2013.
- The production grew rapidly in the first quarter of this year, since then it has remained more or less stable.

4) About tenses

- In 2014, 60% of people in that city used the internet, compared with 10% in 2011.
- The figure for the young population fell from 60% to 50% between 1990 and 2012.
- Young people made up 50% of the total population in 2012.
- Older people accounted for 30% of the population in 2012.
- In 1980, only 15% of the population was older people.
- In the past 30 years, the percentage of the older population has risen from 15% to 30%.
- Over the last 300 hundred years, world population has increased sevenfold.
- The water use of this city has increased by 35 times in the past 20 years.
- In 2050, the older population will increase from 15% in 1990 to 40%.
- The older population will increase by three times by 2050.

5.2 Comparing data

The highest/lowest	number of percentage of amount of proportion of	students people (or other noun)	enjoy (V+ing) ... go to ... like (to + V) ... (or other verb)
The majority of Most Few Hardly any			
More Fractionally/slightly more Far more Much/many/a lot more Substantially/Considerably more	students people (or other noun)	enjoy (V+ing) ... go to ... like (to + V) ... (or other verb)	than
Less/fewer Fractionally/slightly less/fewer Far less/fewer Much/many/a lot less/fewer Substantially/considerably less/fewer	students people (or other noun)		
Half as many Twice as many Three times as many	students people (or other noun)	enjoy (V+ing) ... go to ... like (to + V) ... (or other verb)	as

(Gerund phrase) is/are <i>e.g. Visiting the library</i> is ...	as/just as nearly/almost as not as	common popular	as
	more fractionally/slightly more far more much/a lot more substantially more considerably more significantly more	common popular	
	less fractionally/slightly less far less		than

	much/a lot less substantially less considerably less significantly less		
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Exercises

For exercises related to comparison, visit the following webpages:

- “comparison”: <http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/compare.html>
- “same / as ...as”: <http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/compare.html>
- “more / -er ... than”: <http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/morethan.html>
- “much / more”: <http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/morethan.html>
- “fewer / less”: <http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/fewerless.html>

Note: The above webpages are from a very useful website named “Grammar-Quizzes”:
<http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/index.html> (Last access date: May 15, 2014)

5.3 Describing changes in trends

Some graphs are static, i.e. they show data at one point in time. Many graphs, however, illustrate changes in trends over several periods. Trends are tendencies, or movements in a particular direction. Describing these accurately requires specialized vocabulary. In order to write well and achieve a high mark for a graph description task, you need to use a variety of vocabulary items and not simply repeat the same nouns or verbs such as ‘increase’ or ‘decrease’.

5.3.1 Verbs and nouns**Task 3**

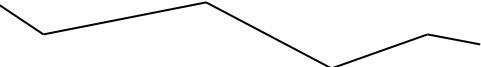
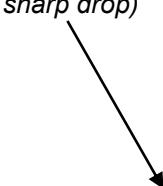
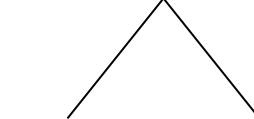
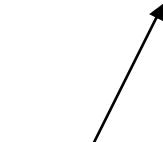
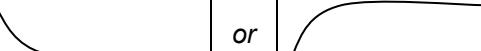
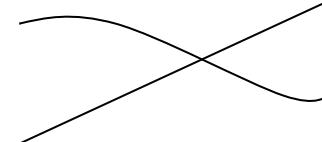
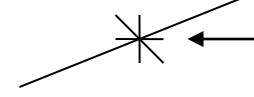
Place the verbs below in the correct boxes, according to the direction of the trend they describe. The first two have already been done for you. (Notice that all the verbs have already been placed in the past tense, as this is usually the tense you use when describing the data in a report.)

<i>decreased (to)</i>	<i>increased (to)</i>	<i>remained steady (at)</i>
<i>fell (to)</i>	<i>dipped (to)</i>	<i>climbed (to)</i>
<i>stayed constant (at)</i>	<i>went up (to)</i>	<i>remained stable (at)</i>
<i>rose (to)</i>	<i>dropped (to)</i>	<i>maintained the same level</i>
<i>declined (to)</i>	<i>did not change</i>	<i>reduced (to)</i>
<i>went down (to)</i>		

Direction of trend	Verb	Noun
↗ (going up)	<i>increased (to)</i>	<i>an increase</i>
↘ (going down)	<i>decreased (to)</i>	<i>a decrease</i>
→ (staying the same)	<i>did not change</i>	<i>no change</i>

Task 4

The above are the three main directions of trends (going up, going down or staying the same), but there are also other kinds of trends that have specialized vocabulary. Match the word/phrase below with the trend.

a)			boomed / a boom surged / a surge
b)	(a sharp drop) 		leveled out / a leveling out
c)			fluctuated / a fluctuation
d)	(a sharp rise) 		bottomed out (at) <i>(the lowest segment on a graph)</i>
e)			a point of intersection a crossover point
f)			plummeted / a plummet slumped / a slump
g)			stood (at)
h)			plateaued (at) / a plateau
i)			peaked (at) / a peak <i>(the highest point on a graph)</i>

5.3.2 Adjectives and adverbs

We can make our writing more accurate by adding adjectives or adverbs that describe the degree or the speed of the change. For instance, look at these three lines. They all show an upward trend, but at different rates. Rather than just saying there was a rise, we could describe these more accurately using phrases such as:

NP: <i>a sharp rise</i>	<i>a steady increase</i>	<i>a slow growth</i>
VP: <i>rose sharply</i>	<i>increased steadily</i>	<i>went up slowly</i>

As with nouns and verbs, you need to try to use a variety of adjectives and adverbs and not just keep repeating the same ones. In the chart below, the adjectives are commonly used to describe the degree or the speed of increases or decreases. These adjectives have an accompanying adverb formed by adding *-ly*. ‘Huge/hugely’ means a very large change, while ‘minimal/minimally’ means a very small change.

Adjectives	Adverbs	Degree
huge	<i>-ly</i>	VL
enormous	<i>-ly</i>	VL
dramatic	<i>dramatically</i>	L
sharp	<i>-ly</i>	L
steep	<i>-ly</i>	L
substantial	<i>-ly</i>	L
considerable	<i>considerably</i>	L
rapid	<i>-ly</i>	L
quick	<i>-ly</i>	L
swift	<i>-ly</i>	L
sudden	<i>-ly</i>	L
significant	<i>-ly</i>	L
marked	<i>-ly</i>	L
moderate	<i>-ly</i>	M
steady	<i>steadily</i>	M
slight	<i>-ly</i>	S
marginal	<i>-ly</i>	S
minimal	<i>-ly</i>	VS

5.4 Two basic sentence structures for a graph description

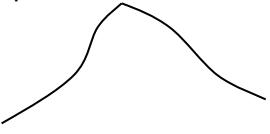
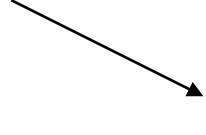
There are two basic and important grammar structures you must master to write a graph description well:

Noun Phrase (NP): There was A + ADJECTIVE + NOUN in ...
e.g. There was a dramatic fall in the number of female smokers.

Verb Phrase (VP): (SUBJECT) VERB + ADVERB.
e.g. The number of female smokers fell dramatically.

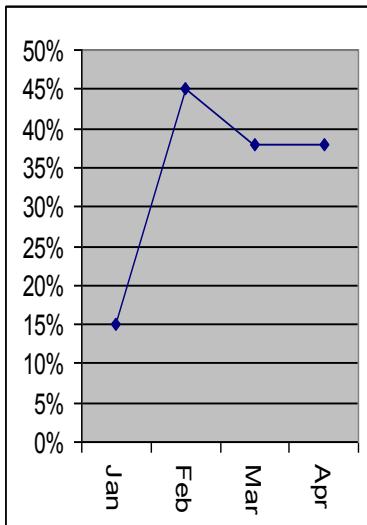
Task 5

Use both noun phrases and verb phrases to describe the following trends. Make sure you use the right grammatical structure. The first one is done for you as an example.

1) the price of pork fluctuated / a fluctuation  <i>Example:</i> (using NP) <u>There was a fluctuation in the price of pork.</u> (using VP) <u>The price of pork fluctuated.</u>	2) the exchange rate peaked / a peak  (using NP): (using VP):
3) the number of AIDS sufferers increased dramatically / a dramatic increase or, rose sharply / a sharp rise, etc.  (using NP) (using VP)	4) property rental prices declined gradually / a gradual decline or, decreased slowly / a slow decrease, etc.  (using NP) (using VP)
5) the air pollution index dropped substantially / a substantial drop, etc.  (using NP) (using VP)	6) the percentage of students applying for BBA levelled out / a levelling out, etc.  (using NP) (using VP)

5.5 Basic prepositions for a graph description: *by, of, to, at, in*

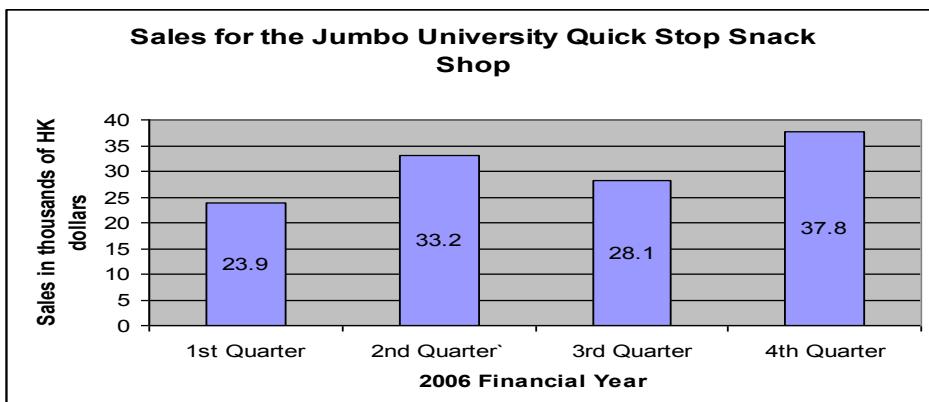
You will need to include some specific figures or percentages, introduced by prepositions, in order to make your graph description more accurate. Incorrect use of prepositions could cause the reader to misunderstand the data.



- **By** and **Of** both describe the amount of change between two points in time:
 - **by** is used with a verb phrase
 - **of** is used with a noun phrase, e.g.
The rate increased by 30% from January to February.
There was an increase of 30% in the rate ...
- **To** is used with a verb phrase, and describes the end-point of a change,
e.g. *In February, the rate rose by 30% to 45%, then dropped to just under 40% one month later.*
- **At** is used with a verb phrase, and describes the position of a single point on a graph, e.g. *In January, the rate stood at 15%.*
- **In** is used to indicate the item being measured after a noun phrase, e.g.
There was a dramatic increase in the house price.

Task 6

Study the graph below, and fill in the correct prepositions in the gaps: **by / of / to / at** (you may use them more than once).



In the first quarter of 2006, the figure for sales stood _____ just under \$24,000. Revenue from sales increased sharply _____ slightly over \$9,000 in the second three months. This was followed by a drop _____ roughly \$5,000 _____ just over \$28,000 for the third period. The final quarter saw sales income booming. They peaked _____ nearly \$38,000, which represents a large increase _____ nearly \$14,000, or 63%, since the beginning of the financial year.

* Note that in this description, not all numerical values are given; however, there are still enough specific details about the trends for us to have an overview of the trends in the graph.

5.6 Tenses in describing graphs

To decide which tense(s) to use for describing a graph, you need to find out whether there is a time element to the graph. Is it the past, the present or the future? Don't forget to look at the title of the graph to see what time it relates to. If no time is given, you can presume that the data are current (see the graph in Task 1).

The general rule is:

- if the graph deals with data in the present, or if there is no indication of time in the graph, use the simple present;
- if the data are about the past, then use the simple past;
- if the data are a prediction in the future, then use the simple future;
- if there is a connection between the past and the present, then use the present perfect.
- if there is a connection between two actions both happening in the past, with one before the other, then use the past perfect.

However, we always use the **present tense** for the first sentence in the introduction to define the chart/graph, for example,

This graph describes ...

This table shows ...

VI. Practice

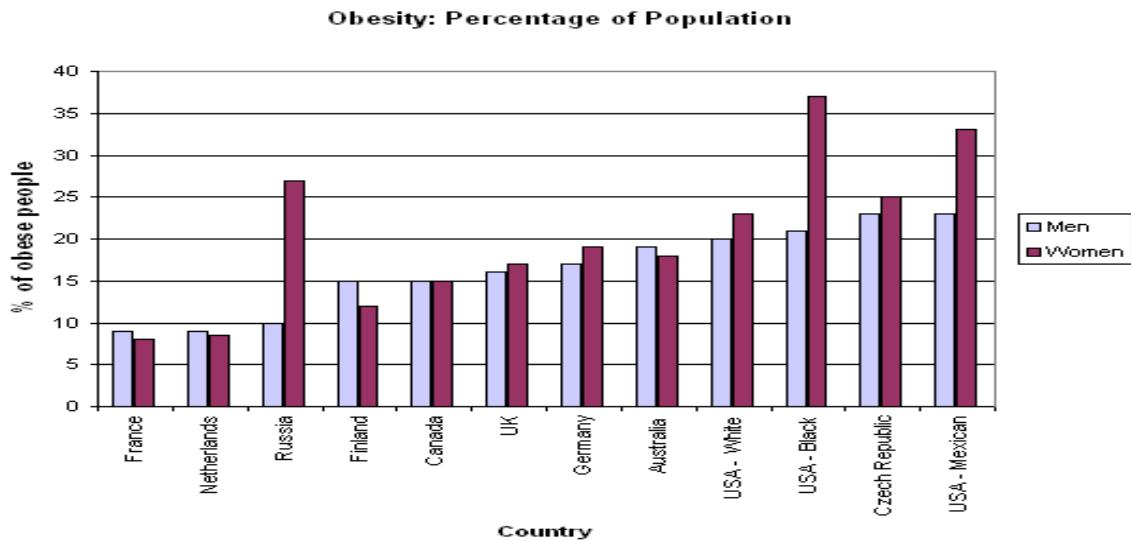
Task 7: Describing a more complicated graph

In Task 1, you described the rates of obese men and women in four countries. The graph below in this task shows the rates of obesity among males and females as a percentage of the population in ten countries (including the four countries in Task 1). This is a more complicated graph.

Your task:

- Write a description of the graph below, at least 200 words.
- Compare your description with a sample essay provided in the Answer key.
- Compare your description (or the sample essay) of this graph with the sample essay of Task 1 to see the difference of description between a simple graph and a complicated one.

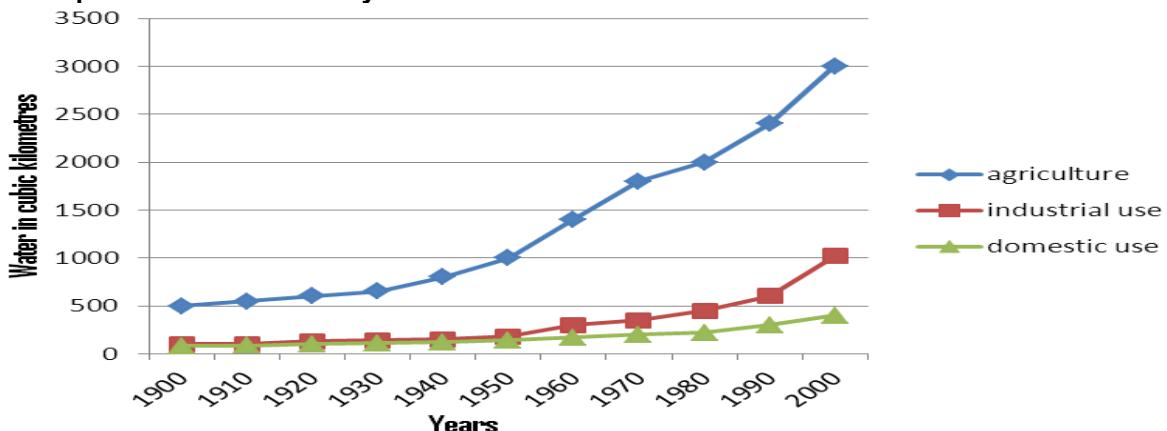
Graph: Obesity: Percentage of population



Your description for Task 7

Task 8: How to describe two graphs

Describe the following graph and table. Write at least 200 words.

Graph: Global water use by sector**Table: Water consumption in Brazil and Congo in 2000**

country	population	irrigated land	water consumption per person
Brazil	176 million	26,500km ²	359 m ³
Congo	5.2 million	100km ²	8 m ³

Practice: Three steps to describe these two graphs**Step 1: Describe the first one - the line graph****A sample description**

This line graph compares water consumption of three sectors in the world between 1900 and 2000. In general, the agricultural sector was the largest consumer of water resources.

The global water consumption of the three sectors shown by the graph was very different. Throughout the century, the largest quantity of water was used for agricultural purpose, and from 1900 to 2000, water use increased greatly from about 500km³ to around 3,000km³. Water used in the industrial and domestic sectors also increased, but consumption was minimal until mid-century. From 1950 onwards, industrial use grew steadily to just over 1,000 km³ in the year 2000, while domestic use rose more slowly to only 400km³, both far below the levels of consumption by agriculture.

In conclusion, agriculture consumed much more water than other sectors.

Step 2: Describe the second one - the table**A sample description**

The table compares the use of water resources in Brazil and Congo in the year 2000. Brazil consumed much more water than Congo.

In Brazil, which had a population of 176 million, the water consumption per person was 359m³, while in Congo with a population of 5.2 million, the water use per person was only 8m³. The contrast was even more startling in terms of agricultural water use, with 26,500km² of irrigated land in Brazil and only 100km² of farm land in Congo. Clearly, a huge amount of water was used in agriculture in Brazil.

In conclusion, the countries differed greatly in water use.

Step 3: Combine the two descriptions for Task 8

Your task:

- (1) Combine the two individual descriptions above.

Attention:

- In the introduction paragraph, you need to mention both the line graph and the table.
- In the conclusion paragraph, you need to indicate whether the main trends in the two graphs show any correlation.

- (2) Compare your description with a sample essay provided in the Answer Key.

Your description for Task 8

Task 9: Insert appropriate verbs in the following description of the number of US farms and farm workers, 1910-2000.

US Farms and Workers, 1910 to 2000



Your task: Insert the appropriate adjectives and adverbs from the box.

similar relatively huge constant rapidly slowly biggest last fairly

The graph shows changes in the number of farms and farm workers in the USA between 1910 and 2000. Overall, there was a _____ drop in the number of workers and farms over the period.

The _____ change was in the number of farm workers. In 1910 there were almost 14 million agricultural workers in the US. This number remained _____ stable for twenty years, dropping only to about 13 million in 1930. However, between 1930 and 1975 the number of labourers plunged. It fell from 13 million in 1935 to just over 4 million in 1975, a drop of about 66%. From 1970 to about 1990 the number continued to decrease, but more _____, and from 1990 numbers appeared to level off at about 3 million.

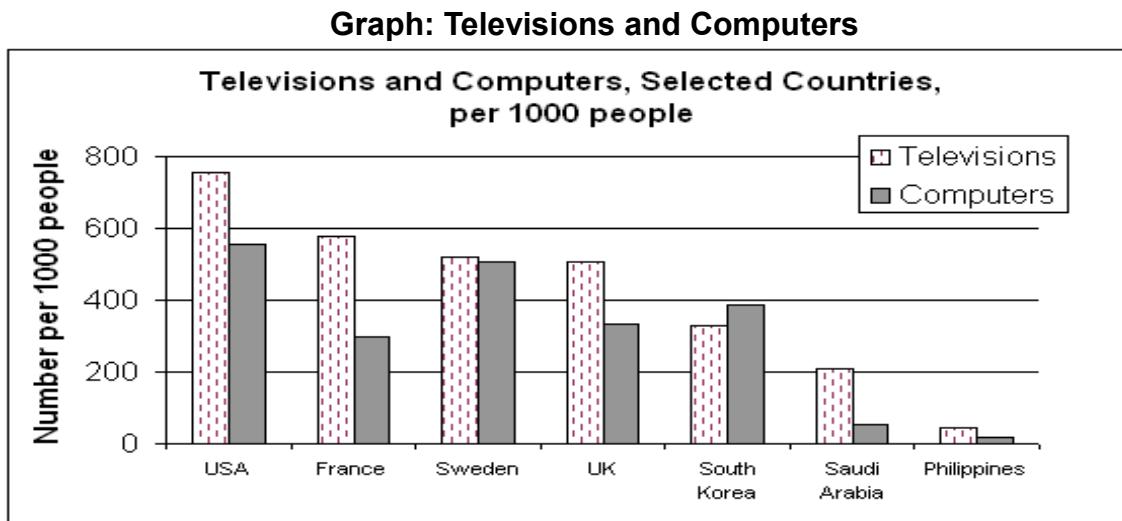
The number of farms followed a _____ decline. Between 1910 and 1940 the number of farms remained _____ at about 6.5 million. After 1945, the number started to drop _____. It fell from 6 million in 1945 to just under 3 million in 1975, a fall of 50%. In the _____ twenty years of the century however, the number remained _____ stable at just over 2 million.

In conclusion, the number of farms and workers in America plummeted over the 100 year period.

(Source: http://www.admc.hct.ac.ae/hd1/english/graphs/line_farms.htm)

Task 10: Error correction

Correct any errors in the use of articles, prepositions, plurals and tenses in the following description.



The graph showed the number of televisions and computers per 1000 users in seven countries.

Overall, most of the countries included in the graph have more televisions than computers.

Number of televisions varies greatly between countries. The biggest audience for television is the Americans, for 750 televisions per 1000 people. In contrast, in the Philippines, there are only 20 televisions for every 1000 people. The figures for the numbers of televisions in Sweden, France and the UK are similar, at between 500 and 600 sets per 1000 people.

In almost all countries, the number of PCs is low than the number of televisions. Biggest gaps are in France and Saudi Arabia. France had twice as many televisions as computers, and Saudi Arabia, there are 200 televisions per 1000 people compared just 50 PCs. In contrast, in Sweden, the number of computers, at 500, is almost the same the figure for televisions. South Korea is very unusual because it has slightly more computers than televisions, at 400 compared to just 350 televisions.

To conclusion, it seems that although there are big differences between countries, computers are still much less common than television in most countries.

(The sample essay is available at: http://www.admc.hct.ac.ae/hd1/english/graphs/bar_tvcomputer_ans.htm)

(4) Graph Description

VII. Checklist

The following marking criteria for the assignment of graph description are a checklist for both students and teachers.

Marking Criteria of Graph Description

Criteria	Excellent (9-10 marks)	Good (7-8 marks)	Satisfactory (5-6 marks)	Poor (4 marks)	Fail (0-3 marks)
Content/Task fulfillment : Ability to show understanding of the graph, of trends and of relationship within the data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent level of awareness of contents • Extremely accurate interpretation and presentation of data • All important points discussed and correlations identified • Task excellently fulfilled overall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good level of awareness of contents • Data generally accurately interpreted and presented • Most important points discussed, correlations identified but could be more fully developed • Task well fulfilled overall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some awareness of contents • Trends and correlations discussed but may not always be accurate • Description may miss some key information. • Satisfactory fulfillment of task overall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited awareness of contents for a graph description. • Failed to identify trends and correlation. • Many pieces of important information missing or irrelevant or incorrect • Poor task fulfillment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely limited awareness of contents. • Some data presented but most of the significant information missing. • Task hardly attempted
Language: accuracy of grammar, range and complexity of structures, range and appropriacy of vocabulary used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning always clear • Excellent range of appropriate structures and sophisticated academic style • Very rare or no grammar mistakes • High degree of precision in lexical choice, and extensive use of words related to task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning generally clear • Good range of appropriate structures and a clear sense of academic style • Few grammatical mistakes • Good degree of precision in lexical choice, and good range of words used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning sometimes obscured • Satisfactory range of structures and intermittent sense of academic style • Some grammatical mistakes. • Satisfactory range and degree of precision in lexical choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning often obscured by weak grammar • Very limited range of structures and style may be inappropriate for task • Many grammatical mistakes • Often inappropriate lexical choices for intended meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning confusing • Extremely limited or mostly wrongly used structures • Hardly any grammatical sentences • Range of vocabulary absolutely insufficient for task
Organization: Text structure (introduction-body-conclusion), paragraph structure (topic sentence and relevant supporting sentences), text coherence and cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skills impressive • A very clear text structure, and materials well sequenced (topic sentence + supporting evidence) within the paragraph • Very logical progression of graphic information, with a range of cohesive devices appropriately used • Text communicates fluently to the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skills good • A clear text structure and materials well sequenced (topic sentence + supporting details) within the paragraph • Logical progression of graphic information, with a good use of cohesive devices • Text communicates quite fluently to the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skills reasonable • A fairly clear text structure, and reasonable sequence of material within the paragraph • Progression of ideas satisfactory, with some cohesive devices well used • Text generally communicates to the reader although there is some strain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skills weak • An unclear organizational pattern, with introduction and/or conclusion missing • Progression of ideas illogical with limited or often wrong use of cohesive devices • Presentation of data often confusing • Text causes strain to the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing skills extremely weak. • No identifiable organizational pattern • Isolated data randomly presented without cohesive devices to show relationship • Presentation of data very confusing • Text causes great strain to the reader



Argumentative Writing

A basic writing skill for “Discussion” in academic papers

Contents

- I. Importance of argument in academic writing
- II. Argumentative topics
- III. General structure of an argumentative essay
- IV. Four common organizing patterns for argumentative essays
- V. Language for argumentative writing:
 - 5.1 Useful expressions
 - 5.2 Transitional devices
- VI. Practice
- VII. Checklist

I. Importance of argument in academic writing

The argumentative essay is a genre of writing that requires the student to investigate a topic, collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner. Argumentative essay assignments generally call for extensive research of literature or previously published material. Detailed research allows the student to learn about the topic and to understand different points of view regarding the topic so that s/he may choose a position and support it with the evidence collected during research. Regardless of the amount or type of research involved, argumentative essays must establish a clear thesis and follow sound reasoning.

(cited from *Argumentative Essays* at: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/>)

A clear sense of argument is essential to all forms of academic writing. The conventions of the academic essay may vary in expression from discipline to discipline, but any good essay should show us a mind developing a thesis, supporting that thesis with evidence, deftly anticipating objections or counter-arguments, and maintaining the momentum of discovery.

(cited from *Overview of the Academic Essay* at: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/Overvu.html>)

"For American students to do better—all of them, not just twenty percent—they need to know that summarizing and making arguments is the name of the game in academia" (Graff, 2003: 3).

(Graff, G. 2003. *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.)

A common research paper consists of 8 basic sections: (1) abstract, (2) introduction, (3) literature review, (4) methodology (or experiments), (5) findings (or results), (6) **discussion**, (7) conclusion, and (8) references. (See the sample research paper by Chan and Hu 2008). **The discussion section is where authors make arguments.** They explain how their research questions/hypotheses are supported (or not supported) by two types of evidence: evidence from previous research findings (literature review) and evidence from their own research results. Discussion is considered as the heart of the research paper.

II. Argumentative topics

The importance of argument is reflected in the required argumentative essay writing in TOEFL, IELTS and GRE. The following are some argumentative topics from the three tests.

- (1) Some people believe that the media, such as the press, TV and Internet should be more strictly controlled. Others feel that controls should be loosened to give people freer access to information.

To what extent do you agree or disagree? (IELTS)

- (2) Some people say that parents should not expect schools to control children's behavior and to tell them what is right and wrong. Others say schools should take this responsibility.

Give your point of view. (IELTS)

- (3) Your government has announced that it wishes to build a military base near your community. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this new influence on your community.

Do you support or oppose the military base? (TOEFL)

- (4) Some students prefer to attend a small university. Others prefer to attend a big university.

Discuss the advantages of each. Then indicate which type of university you prefer? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer. (TOEFL)

- (5) Educational institutions have a responsibility to dissuade students from pursuing fields of study in which they are unlikely to succeed.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position. (GRE – “Analyze an Issue” task)

- (6) To understand the most important characteristics of a society, one must study its major cities.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement and explain your reasoning for the position you take. In developing and supporting your position, you should consider ways in which the statement might or might not hold true and explain how these considerations shape your position. (GRE – “Analyze an Issue” task)

All argumentative topics have PROs and CONs. All these essay questions ask for your opinion and your reasons. A good argumentative essay not only reflects the language skills of the writer, but also his/her critical thinking ability, analytical ability and reasoning ability.

A brief summary of the writing tasks of TOEFL, IELTS and GRE

Test	Writing task	Test time
TOEFL	Task 1: The reading-listening-writing Integrated task	20 minutes
	Task 2: Independent writing task – Tell the truth	40 minutes
IELTS	Task 1: Graph description	20 minutes
	Task 2: Argumentative	30 minutes
GRE	Task 1: Analyze an issue	30 minutes
	Task 2: Analyze an argument	30 minutes

- **TOEFL** - Test of English as a Foreign Language (a standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers)
- **IELTS** - The International English Language Testing System (a standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers)
- **GRE** - The Graduate Record Examination (an admissions requirement for most graduate schools in the United States)

III. General structure of an argumentative essay

INTRODUCTION	Background (brief) followed by: thesis statement (your position / main argument)
BODY PARAGRAPHS	Your own arguments + support (reasons for your thesis statement) Counterarguments + refutations (argument contrary to your thesis statement, contrary considerations) + (your responses, defense to objections)
CONCLUSION	Summary of points or restatement of position

Note: the number of body paragraphs depends on the number of main arguments/counterarguments.

3.1 Introduction

The introduction of an argumentative essay consists of two core parts:

1. Background:

You must introduce the topic, by providing some brief background related to the topic. For example, defining the key terms, describing the context or situation etc.

2. Thesis statement:

You must provide a clear thesis statement. A thesis statement:

- should clearly and directly state your position or your point of view in relation to the issue discussed and you may include your reasons of support after the thesis statement;
- should be narrow, focused and can be supported;
- should be debatable (e.g. "Happiness is very important to our health" is not debatable. It is an accepted fact and we don't need to persuade people about it.)

Task 1: Evaluate the following thesis statements. Which of them are good or not good enough? Why?

- (1) Anyone, including those with Down's syndromes, can tell that this statement is true.
- (2) I am an ardent supporter of this policy and my reasons will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.
- (3) Pollution is bad for the environment.
- (4) Hong Kong's anti-pollution efforts should focus on reducing our daily waste (e.g. food waste) because it would allow most citizens to contribute to our environment and care about the outcome.
- (5) At least 25 percent of the Hong Kong government budget should be spent on limiting pollution because only with this resource can we effectively reduce the pollution by 40% within 5 years.
- (6) It is indeed a controversial issue and we should consider it carefully.
- (7) The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that, contrary to the opinion of many experts, the potential benefits of learning vocabulary methodically are considerable.

- (8) The death penalty is wrong.
- (9) Media violence is harmful to society.
- (10) School uniforms provide many benefits to students, parents and educators.

For more information on thesis statements, visit:

<http://www.englishw.com/TopicSentQuiz.php>
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/>
<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/thesis/>
http://lc.brooklyn.cuny.edu/smattutor/writing_guides/pdfs/Developing_Thesis_Statement_and_Worksheets.pdf
<http://www2.latech.edu/~bmagee/removed/thesis.html>

Task 2: Use 4 - 6 sentences to write an introduction paragraph for the following topic:

Topic: As computers are being used more and more in education, there will be soon no role for teachers in the classroom. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Compare your introduction with a sample introduction below.

Sample introduction (1)	
Education and the learning process have greatly changed since the introduction of computers. The search for information has become more interesting and convenient. However, computers have not yet become a substitute of the human interaction in the learning process. In my opinion, what can be expected is a change of the teachers' role, but not their disappearance from the classroom.	background thesis statement

Task 3: Use 4 - 6 sentences to write an introduction paragraph for the following topic:

Topic: All countries should abolish capital punishment. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Use specific reasons to support your answer.

Compare your introduction with a sample introduction below.

Sample introduction (2)	
Capital punishment is a legal process whereby a person is put to death by a state as punishment for a serious crime. In much of Western Europe, capital punishment has been abolished for all crimes; but in about 100 countries, such as China, Japan, the U.S.A., the death penalty is still in practice. The subject of capital punishment is hotly debated. Some people strongly believe that all countries should abolish it, while others strongly support this punishment. I support the death penalty and my argument is based on deterrence and justice.	definition background and showing views from both sides thesis statement + reasons

3.2 Body paragraphs

Constructing effective body paragraphs of an argumentative essay requires two skills: the general paragraph writing skill and the skill to present counterarguments and refutation.

1. General paragraph writing: topic sentence and support

Generally, each reason in support of your thesis should be placed in a separate paragraph. A typical supporting paragraph structure goes like this:

- **Topic sentence:** This is a reason for your thesis statement, usually consisting of a topic and its controlling idea. e.g. Capital punishment itself is murder, and is a crime.
- **Support:** there are many ways to support your reason. Some commonly used ones are:
 - statistics
 - explanation with examples
 - clarification
 - compare and contrast
 - cause and effect

For a quick review of general paragraph writing, visit the following two websites:

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/01/>
- http://college.cengage.com/devenglish/wong/paragraph_essentials/1e/students/ace/index.html

2. Paragraphs of counterarguments and refutation

To write a good argumentative paper, it is necessary to possess knowledge on the subject and to research and analyze not only the pros but also the cons on the topic. In your essay, it is very important to discuss both the pros and cons. Even when the essay question is “give your point of view”, or “to what extent do you agree or disagree?”, you should state your opinion and also include the counter-arguments (the arguments opposite to yours) and refutation to show that you understand the issue and are fully aware of the major arguments from both sides. You need to introduce the counterargument(s) directly and clearly. For example:

- Supporters/proponents of death penalty argue/claim that... (or opponents/critics of death penalty argue/claim...)
- It is a common misconception that...
- While we adhere firmly to our belief, there are many others who argue that...

After presenting a counter-argument, you need to refute it and explain why this counterargument is not true, or not valid. You need to use transitional words/phrases to clearly introduce your refutation, for example:

- It is true that...however...therefore...
- Certainly...but...in short...
- Admittedly...on the other hand...so...
- Of course...nevertheless...as a result...
- Obviously...on the contrary...finally...
- Sure...however...in addition...
- Although...still...
- Even though/even if...however...

Counterarguments can appear anywhere in an argumentative essay, but it most commonly appears:

- as a body paragraph just after your introduction; or
- as a body paragraph just before your conclusion.

The following are two samples of the “counterargument + refutation” paragraph in a short argumentative essay such as the writing in the IELTS Test.

Sample body paragraph: counter-argument + refutation (1)	
<p>A major argument from people against capital punishment is that it violates human's basic right to life because it itself is murder. Nobody in a humane society has the right to take life away from somebody. I agree that each life is valuable. However, there is a justice issue here. We shouldn't forget that heinous criminals such as murderers have taken from other people their lives in the first place. The right of the victims and victim families should be considered for justice. By death penalty we actually affirm the value of the lost innocent lives. What is more important is that the public has the right for a strong criminal justice system that deters future violent crimes and protects lives. All guilty people deserve to be punished according to their crimes. This message should be very clear in a just society to maintain social order.</p>	counter-argument refutation
Sample body paragraph: counter-argument + refutation (2)	
<p>Supporters for ocean parks argue that these parks provide the only opportunity for much of the public to see marine mammals. Most Australians, so this argument goes, live in cities and never get to see these animals. It is claimed that marine parks allow the average Australian to appreciate our marine wildlife. However, as Smith (1990) states, dolphins, whales and seals can be viewed in the wild at a number of places on the Australian coast. In fact, there are more places where they can be seen in the wild than places where they can be seen in captivity. Moreover, most Australians would have to travel less to get to these locations than they would to get to the marine parks on the Gold Coast. In addition, places where there are wild marine mammals do not charge an exorbitant entry fee - they are free.</p>	counter-argument refutation

3.3 Conclusion

The concluding paragraph pulls all the main ideas of the essay together and indicates that you have proven your point. It can:

- summarize your points: You may give a brief review or summary of your reasoning.
e.g. To conclude, I have examined/discussed two major aspects of...
- restate your thesis: You can write a strong firm statement to rephrase your thesis. This restatement is important because it makes the whole essay/argument solid and complete. However, the wording must be different from those in the thesis statement in the introduction.
e.g. To conclude, I have argued that...

There should not be any new points or arguments in the conclusion because readers will expect you to elaborate on them.

3.4 Avoid the over-use of rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions do not require answers, but function as emphatic statements. Here are some examples:

- Who could argue that democracy is not important?
- If practice makes perfect, and no one's perfect, then why practice?
- Who does not love his country?
- How can you be so stupid?

When used appropriately, rhetorical questions can coerce readers into taking your side. However, over-reliance on this kind of question will undermine the effectiveness of your argument. Beginning or ending every paragraph with a rhetorical question is a weak way of transitioning or concluding. You must choose your rhetorical questions very carefully and selectively to make sure they are relevant and thought-provoking. Furthermore, asking too many questions can make your writing informal because it will look like a question and answer session.

IV. Four common organizing patterns for argumentative essays

The questions of argumentative essays in IELTS and TOEFL are in two general types:

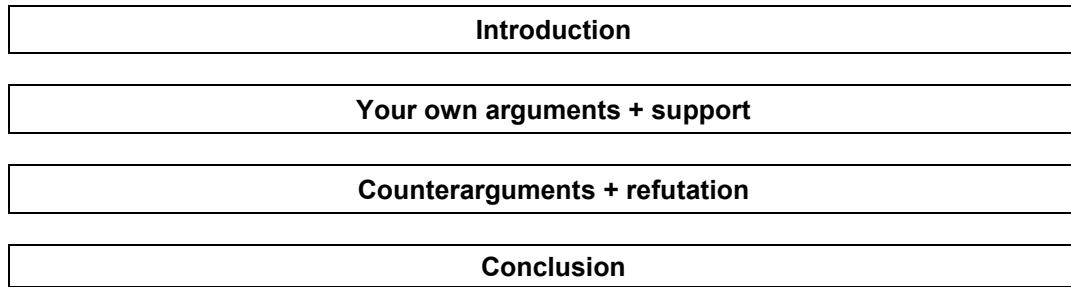
- Do you agree / disagree, or to what extent do you agree or disagree...?
- Discuss the opinions / arguments from both sides and state your opinion.

No matter how the question is asked, the core requirement for an argumentative essay is:

(1) you must mention the major arguments from both sides to demonstrate your full understanding of the controversial issue;

(2) you must directly and clearly state your own opinion/stance/position and provide reasons.

Below are four common organizing patterns for argumentative essays. The major difference of these patterns is in body paragraphs and there is no main difference in the introduction paragraph or the conclusion paragraph.

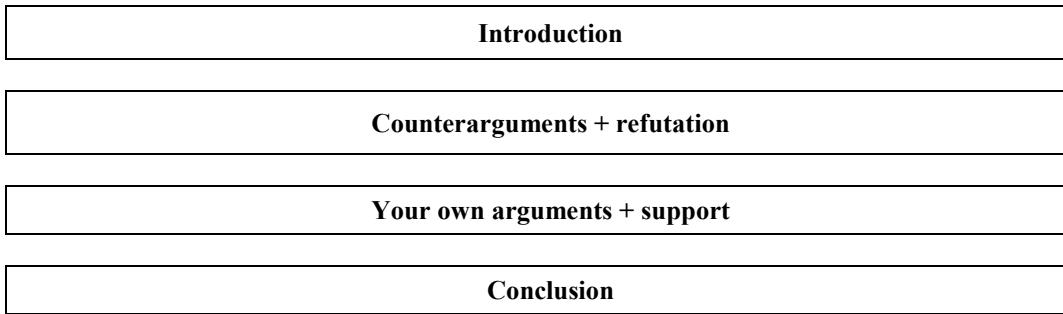
4.1: Pattern 1**A sample essay for Pattern 1**

Essay question: All countries should abolish capital punishment. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Use specific reasons to support your answer.

Sample Pattern 1	
Capital punishment is a legal process whereby a person is put to death by a state as punishment for a serious crime. In much of Western Europe, capital punishment has been abolished for all crimes; but in about 100 countries, such as China, Japan, the U.S.A., the death penalty is still in practice. The subject of capital punishment is hotly debated. Some people strongly believe that all countries should abolish it, while others strongly support this punishment. I support the death penalty and my argument is based on deterrence and justice.	background: definition + introducing two sides
My key argument is that the death penalty deters serious crime, such as murder. Many recent studies by economists have compared the number of executions with homicide rates over time and found that murder rates tend to fall as executions rise. For example, the research (2003) by economists Hashem Dezhbakhsh, Paul R. Rubin, and Joanna M. Shepherd of Emory University analyzed a panel data set of 3,054 counties in the U.S.A. from 1977 to 1996. They found that the death penalty had a strong deterrent effect and each execution might save, on average, the lives of 18 potential victims. In another study (2004) by Professor Joanna M. Shepherd, the results showed that longer death row waits had lessened the deterrent effect of capital punishment. Shepherd suggested that to achieve the greatest deterrent effect from the death penalty, offenders should be executed as soon as possible. To economists, it is obvious that if the cost of an activity rises, the amount of the activity will drop. Death is the highest cost, so the death penalty discourages crime.	thesis statement + reasons
A major argument from people against capital punishment is that it violates human's basic right to life because it itself is murder. Nobody in a humane society has the right to take life away from somebody. I agree that each life is valuable. However, there is a justice issue here. We shouldn't forget that heinous criminals such as murderers have taken from other people their lives in the first place. The right of the victims and victim families should be considered for justice. By death penalty we actually affirm the value of the lost innocent lives. What is more important is that the public has the right for a strong criminal justice system that deters future violent crimes and protects lives. All guilty people deserve to be punished according to their crimes. This message should be very clear in a just society to maintain social order.	my argument + support counter-argument my refutation
In conclusion, I have argued that the death penalty shouldn't be abolished for two reasons: statistical evidence confirms the death penalty's deterrent effect and it is needed as a means of retributive justice. (446 words)	conclusion

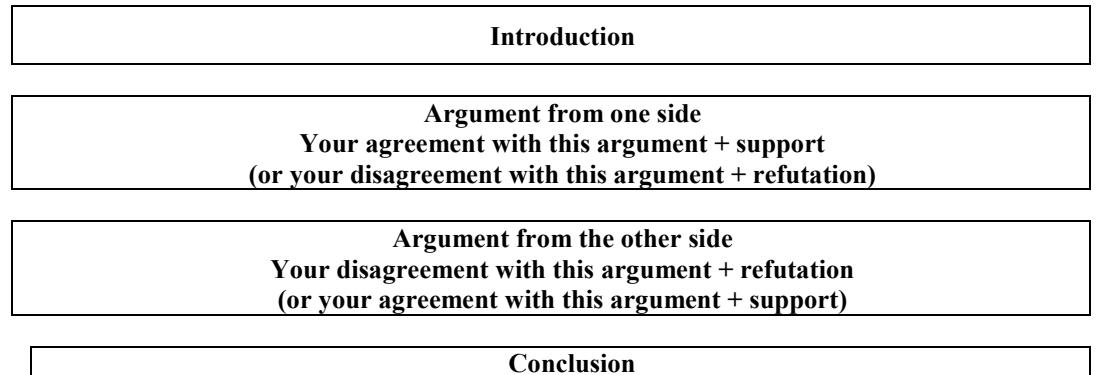
The essay about capital punishment in this handout is based on information from the following sources:

- <http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty/abolitionist-and-retentionist-countries>
- <http://www.cjlf.org/deathpenalty/dpdeterrencefull.htm>
- Dezhbakhsh, Hashem, Rubin, Paul H. & Shepherd, Joanna M. (2003). *Does Capital Punishment Have a Deterrent Effect? New Evidence from Postmoratorium Panel Data.* *American Law & Economics Review*, 5, 2: 344-376.
- Shepherd, Joanna M (2004). Murders of Passion, Execution Delays, and the Deterrence of Capital Punishment. *Journal of Legal Studies*, 33: 453-478.

4.2: Pattern 2**A sample essay for Pattern 2**

Essay question: All countries should abolish capital punishment. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Use specific reasons to support your answer.

Sample Pattern 2	
<p>Capital punishment is a legal process whereby a person is put to death by a state as punishment for a serious crime. In much of Western Europe, capital punishment has been abolished for all crimes; but in about 100 countries, such as China, Japan, the U.S.A., the death penalty is still in practice. The subject of capital punishment is hotly debated. Some people strongly believe that all countries should abolish it, while others strongly support this punishment. I support the death penalty and my argument is based on justice and deterrence.</p> <p>A major argument from people against capital punishment is that it violates human's basic right to life because it itself is murder. Nobody in a humane society has the right to take life away from somebody. It is true that each life is valuable. However, there is a justice issue here. We shouldn't forget that heinous criminals such as murderers have taken from other people their lives in the first place. The right of the victims and victim families should be considered for justice. By death penalty we actually affirm the value of the lost innocent lives. What is more important is that the public has the right for a strong criminal justice system that deters future violent crimes and protects lives. All guilty people deserve to be punished according to their crimes. This message should be very clear in a just society to maintain social order.</p> <p>My key argument is that the death penalty deters serious crime, such as murder. Many recent studies by economists have compared the number of executions with homicide rates over time and found that murder rates tend to fall as executions rise. For example, the research (2003) by economists Hashem Dezhbakhsh, Paul R. Rubin, and Joanna M. Shepherd of Emory University analyzed a panel data set of 3,054 counties in the U.S.A. from 1977 to 1996. They found that the death penalty had a strong deterrent effect and each execution might save, on average, the lives of 18 potential victims. In another study (2004) by Professor Joanna M. Shepherd, the results showed that longer death row waits had lessened the deterrent effect of capital punishment. Shepherd suggested that to achieve the greatest deterrent effect from the death penalty, offenders should be executed as soon as possible. To economists, it is obvious that if the cost of an activity rises, the amount of the activity will drop. Death is the highest cost, so the death penalty discourages crime.</p> <p>In conclusion, I have argued that the death penalty shouldn't be abolished for two reasons: statistical evidence confirms the death penalty's deterrent effect and it is needed as a means of retributive justice. (447 words)</p>	<p>background: definition + introducing two sides</p> <p>thesis statement + reasons</p> <p>counter-argument</p> <p>My refutation</p> <p>my argument + support</p> <p>conclusion</p>

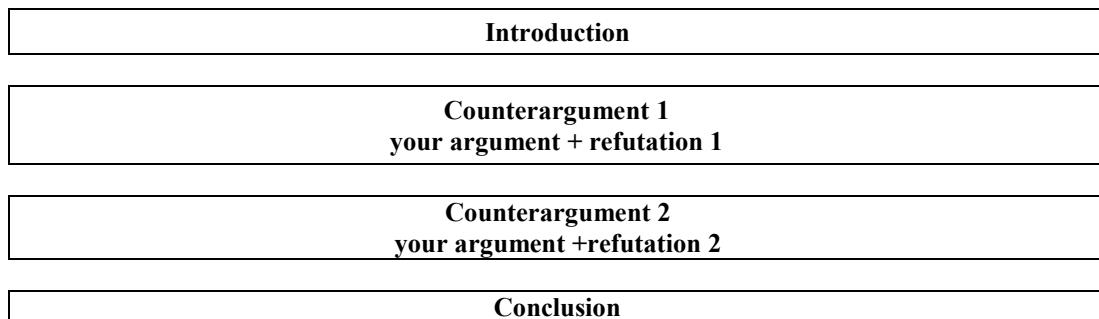
4.3: Pattern 3**A sample essay for Pattern 3**

Essay question: Capital punishment is a controversial issue worldwide. Some people strongly support it and some people are strongly against it. Discuss the major arguments from both sides and state your own opinion.

<p style="text-align: center;">Sample Pattern 3</p> <p>Capital punishment is a legal process whereby a person is put to death by a state as punishment for a serious crime. In much of Western Europe, capital punishment has been abolished for all crimes; but in about 100 countries, such as China, Japan, the U.S.A., the death penalty is still in practice. The subject of capital punishment is hotly debated. Some people strongly believe that all countries should abolish it, while others strongly support this punishment. I strongly support the death penalty.</p> <p>Proponents of capital punishment emphasize the potent deterrence of the death penalty. They strongly believe that nothing is so sacred to an individual as his life, so the threat of death will prevent criminals from committing serious crimes. The death penalty, therefore, is the most powerful of all deterrents in the repression of crimes. <u>I agree with this argument.</u> Many recent studies by economists have compared the number of executions with homicide rates over time and found that murder rates tend to fall as executions rise. For example, the research (2003) by economists Hashem Dezhbakhsh, Paul R. Rubin, and Joanna M. Shepherd of Emory University analyzed a panel data set of 3,054 counties in the U.S.A. from 1977 to 1996. They found that the death penalty had a strong deterrent effect and each execution might save, on average, the lives of 18 potential victims. In another study (2004) by Professor Joanna M. Shepherd, the results showed that longer death row waits had lessened the deterrent effect of capital punishment. Shepherd suggested that to achieve the greatest deterrent effect from the death penalty, offenders should be executed as soon as possible. To economists, it is obvious that if the cost of an activity rises, the amount of the activity will drop. Death is the highest cost, so death penalty discourages crime.</p> <p>The major belief of opponents is that capital punishment violates human's basic right to life because it itself is murder. Nobody in a humane society has the right to take life away from somebody. <u>I disagree with this opinion.</u> It is true that each life is valuable. However, there is a justice issue here. We shouldn't forget that heinous criminals such as murderers have taken from other people their lives in the first place. The right of the victims and victim families should be considered for justice. By death penalty we actually affirm the value of the lost innocent lives. What is more important is that the public has the right for a strong criminal justice system that deters future violent crimes and protects lives. All guilty people deserve to be punished according to their crimes. This message should be very clear in a just society to maintain social order.</p> <p>In conclusion, I believe that the death penalty has the effect of reducing crimes and it is needed as a means of retributive justice. In the world today, the death penalty should not be banned. (488 words)</p>	background: definition + introducing two sides thesis statement argument from proponents My agreement + support argument from opponents my disagreement (counterargument) + refutation conclusion
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4.4: Pattern 4

This pattern is slightly more complicated and requires the proper use of transitional phrases to show the different sides of the argument.



A sample essay for Pattern 4

Essay question: Euthanasia is a controversial issue. What is your opinion on this issue?

Sample Pattern 4	
Euthanasia, commonly called mercy killing, is the practice of putting to death painlessly a person suffering from an incurable disease. Some people think that euthanasia should never be an option no matter what the situation, while some others support it in all forms as long as it is performed for the sake of relieving the sufferer. In my opinion, euthanasia should not be allowed under any circumstances.	background: definition + introducing two sides
One major argument from proponents of euthanasia is that it should be allowed when patients suffer from a fatal disease such as AIDS and experience a lot of pain. Patients in this situation usually cannot take care of themselves. The low quality of life makes them lose their dignity and consequently their desire to die with dignity overrides all their other concerns. However, the incapability of taking care of oneself and being perceived as a burden to others should not be justifiable reasons to take one's life. If this is right, what we are propagating is that mentally and physically handicapped people should be allowed to die. Furthermore, in the future, pain could be controllable with medical breakthroughs. Whether or not there is any loss of dignity is a matter of perception. Without a yardstick to measure what is considered a loss of dignity or a dignified life, it is hard to justify euthanasia based on this ground. Therefore, a need for ending suffering and dying with dignity should not be considered a reason favoring euthanasia.	thesis statement counterargument 1 my argument + refutation 1
Another important pro-euthanasia argument emphasizes that an individual has a right to control his or her life including its end, and doctors should respect and accept their patient's decision. Nonetheless, this argument is fraught with pitfalls. This view talks about two rights: the right of patients to die and the right of doctors to help end lives. The answer to the second right is straightforward. The duty of doctors is to heal and save lives, not to end lives. Doctors don't have the right to kill. On the other hand, the right to die is a complicated issue. Though committing suicide is not a crime in many societies, it is a behavior that societies, schools and families in the world today try to prevent. The right to die, differing from other human rights, is not encouraged nor accepted by many people. In the case of patients suffering from terminal illnesses and excruciating pain, the issue is much more complex. These patients may not think rationally as healthy people. Some very sick patients may even have lost cognitive ability. It is very difficult to judge the decision of these patients. Besides, this so-called patient's right can be open to abuse. Some people with ulterior motives may even take advantage of the situation and commit euthanasia against the wishes of patients. Hence, the right to die is not a sufficient reason for euthanasia either.	counterargument 2 my argument + refutation 2
In conclusion, I have argued that euthanasia, no matter under what circumstances, must be banned. The dignity of critically ill people and the ending of suffering should not be achieved by euthanasia, but by better medical care and love. The right to die weakens society's respect for the sanctity of life. (531 words)	conclusion

V. Language for argumentative writing

5.1 Useful expressions

(1) Presenting supporting arguments

- The main/major/first/most important advantage of...
- A further positive argument ...
- One/Another/An additional point in favor of...
- One point of view in favor of...
- A better argument would be....
- A whole new way to think about this topic is...
- I am for the proposition that...
- I support the proposition that...
- One advantage of this argument is...

(2) Elaborating or developing ideas

- This may be the result of...
- The most likely reason for this is that...
- A possible reason for this is...
- One solution to address this problem would be ...
- I could develop this idea by adding...
- Another way to put it would be...
- We can see an example of this in...
- In addition to the above, we have to think about...
- There are also other points to think about, namely...

(3) Presenting counter-arguments

- It is often suggested/believed/argued that...
- Some/many people suggest/feel/argue that ...
- Some/many people are in favor of/are convinced that ...
- In arguing against this idea, one can point out that...
- The main argument against... is that...
- It can be argued that...
- On the other hand...

(4) Refuting

- I am against /object to the proposition that...
- I do not find this argument convincing as...
- This argument is irrelevant
- One major disadvantage of ...
- The main/most important disadvantage/drawback of...
- There are many disadvantages to this because...
- One/Another/An additional disadvantage of...

(7) Concluding

- Overall, we can conclude that....
- In conclusion, ... (or, To conclude, ...)
- Therefore, my main point is...
- After careful consideration, it can be seen that...
- Taking everything into account, ...
- As was previously stated...
- Without doubt, we can say that...

5.2. Transitional devices/discourse markers

Transitional devices or discourse markers are like bridges or signposts in your essay. They can either help link sentences or ideas together smoothly, or show readers the directions that the writer is going. In this way, the ideas are more coherent and the language is more cohesive. There are many types of transitional devices, and each category leads readers to make certain connections or assumptions. Here is a brief list of some common discourse markers.

Types	Examples
To add	also, then, besides, furthermore, moreover, in addition, what's more, next
To compare/contrast	in the same way, by the same token, similarly, likewise, whereas, but, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, in contrast, by comparison, although, conversely, while
To show effect	because, for, since, that is, due to, thus, therefore, hence
To sequence	first(ly), second(ly), finally, previously, formerly, next, then, later, lastly, and so forth, following, afterwards, subsequently, concurrently, simultaneously
To repeat	in other words, as I have said (noted/mentioned), that is (i.e.)
To emphasize (use sparingly)	definitely, extremely, obviously, indeed, absolutely, never, emphatically, unquestionably, without doubt, certainly, undeniably, without reservation
To provide example	for example, for instance, to demonstrate, to illustrate, as an illustration
To conclude	in brief, on the whole, summing up, to conclude, in conclusion, as a result, consequently, all in all, the bottom line is

Online exercises on conjunction

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_49.htm

Contrasting conjunctives:

<http://www.esltower.com/GRAMMARSHEETS/conjunction/contrasting%20conjunctions.pdf>

VI. Practice

Practice 1: Write about the following topic, in at least 250 words.

Topic: As computers are being used more and more in education, there will be soon no role for teachers in the classroom. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Your essay for Practice 1

Practice 2: Write about the following topic, in at least 250 words.

Topic: Gambling is not legal in many countries because many people think that it is harmful to society, especially it may ruin gamblers' careers and families. However, some people argue that gambling should be legalized because it is good for economy and could create a taxable stream of revenue to the government. Discuss both views and state your own opinion.

Your essay for Practice 2

Practice 3: Here is a list of 30 topics for argumentative essays in IELTS, for your practice.

There are many issues in society that people disagree about. A critical thinker is a good observer, a good reader, a good listener, a good participator in discussion and tries to understand different perspectives of a controversial issue. (source: <http://www.dcielts.com/writing-2/essays/science-and-technology/>)

The family

1. The education a child receives at home from having parents who are positive role models is more important than the academic education a child receives at school. To what extent do you agree or disagree?
2. In many countries there has been an increase in social problems involving teenagers in recent years. Many people believe that this is due to modern lifestyles because parents spend more and more time at work and have less time to supervise their children. To what extent do you believe this is true?
3. People are now living longer than ever before and many old people are unable to look after themselves. Some people believe that it is the responsibility of families to look after the elderly, while others say governments should provide retirement homes for them where they can be looked after properly. Discuss.
4. Modern lifestyles mean that many parents have little time for their children. Many children do not get as much attention from their parents as children did in the past. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Sport and leisure

5. Some people believe that the government should ban dangerous sporting activities while others think that people have the freedom to do whatever sports they choose. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.
6. It is commonly thought that it is healthy for adults to maintain an outside interest in order to relax or stay fit. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of 3 of the following sports and pastimes:
tennis, walking, visiting museums, reading, joining a club, going to a gym
7. Many people want their country to host an international sporting event. Others believe that international sporting events bring more problems than benefits. Discuss both views and include your opinion, supported by examples.
8. Some people believe that competitive sports have a positive effect on children's education, while others believe there is no place for such sports in schools. Discuss both points of view and give your own opinion.
9. In many countries people working in sport and entertainment earn much more money than professionals like doctors, nurses and teachers. Why do you think this happens in some societies and do you consider it is good or bad?

Employment and money

10. Some people think that teenagers should do unpaid work to help society because this will help them to be better individuals and also improve the society as a whole. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal?
11. Some people think that only staff who worked in a company for a long time should be promoted to a higher position. What's your opinion?
12. Some people argue that the government should give every unemployed person a mobile phone and should make sure they have access to the Internet. They believe this is the best way of using public money to reduce the problem of unemployment. To what extent do you agree or disagree?
13. In many countries, children are engaged in some kind of paid work. Some people regard this as completely wrong, while others consider it as valuable work experience, important for learning and taking responsibilities. Discuss.

Media and advertising

14. Newspapers and books are outdated. Why do some people believe this? What is your opinion?
15. Consumers are faced with increasing numbers of advertisements from competing companies. To what extent do you think consumers are influenced by advertisements? What measures can be taken to protect them?
16. News editors decide what to broadcast on television and what to print in newspapers. What factors do you think influence these decisions? Do we become used to bad news? Would it be better if more good news was reported? Discuss.

17. Some people believe that the media, such as the press, TV and Internet should be more strictly controlled. Others feel that controls should be loosened to give people freer access to information. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Crime and law

18. Without capital punishment (the death penalty) our lives are less secure and crimes of violent increase. Capital punishment is essential to control violence in society. To what extent do you agree or disagree?
19. Tobacco and alcohol are drugs that cause addition and health problems. Should they be made illegal? Or should all drugs be legalized?

Travel and transport

20. In many countries tourism is a major part of the economy, but it also causes environmental damage and ruins the places it exploits. It is argued that tourists should pay an additional tax to compensate for this damage. Do you agree?
21. In the modern world car ownership is regarded as a right. However, some argue that governments should try to reduce the number of cars on the road by improving public transport, as the growing number of cars on the road causes traffic congestion and pollution. Discuss.

Science and technology

22. We live today in an electronic information age. It is easier to be connected by technology yet many people seem no closer to feeling happy in their lives. In what extent do you agree or disagree.
23. The threat of nuclear weapons maintains world peace. Nuclear power provides cheap and clean energy. The benefits of nuclear technology far outweigh the disadvantages. Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer.
24. Some people say that the Internet is making the world smaller by bringing people together. To what extent do you agree that the internet is making it easier for people to communicate with one another?

Government

25. The world is consuming natural resources faster than they can be renewed. Therefore, it is important that products are made to last. Governments should discourage people from constantly buying more up to date or fashionable products. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
26. As populations around the world grow older, the cost of healthcare for the elderly is rising. Some people say that it is the responsibility of the government to provide support, while others believe that families should be responsible for caring for their elderly relatives? What is your opinion?
27. Healthcare is increasingly expensive and not everyone is able to afford the treatment they need due to the high cost of drugs and medical procedures. Some people argue that this is unjust and that governments should provide free healthcare for all their citizens. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

Education

28. Some people believe that exams are an inappropriate way of measuring students' performance and should be replaced by continuous assessment. Do you agree or disagree with this view?
29. Some people argue that universities should provide students with more practical training for their future career. Should university education be more vocational or academic. Discuss

Globalization

30. One of the major problems facing the world today is the growing number of refugees. The developed nations in the world should tackle this problem by taking in more refugees. To what extent do you agree with this opinion?

(For more information on argumentative writing:

- <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/>
- <http://eacfaculty.org/owl/resources/genres.html>
- <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/argument/>)

VII. Checklist

The following marking criteria for the assignment of argumentative writing are a checklist for both students and teachers.

Marking Criteria of Argumentative Essay

Marking Criteria	Excellent 9-10 marks	Good 7-8 marks	Satisfactory 5-6 marks	Marginal Pass 4 marks	Fail 0-3 marks
Content: thesis statement, arguments, major ideas and supporting evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a very good understanding of the essay topic. Shows a very clear thesis statement, with clear arguments and refuted counterarguments. Presents very relevant evidence to support the arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a good understanding of the essay topic. Shows a clear thesis statement, with arguments and counterarguments refuted to some extent. Presents relevant evidence to support the arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a reasonable understanding of the essay topic. Shows a thesis statement, with some arguments and un-refuted counterarguments. Presents some relevant evidence to support the arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates a marginal understanding of the essay topic. The thesis statement is not clearly stated, or there is no thesis statement. There are some arguments, but no counterarguments. There is little evidence to support the arguments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little or no understanding of the topic. The thesis statement and arguments/counterarguments cannot be identified. There is insufficient or inadequate evidence to support the argument.
Language: grammar accuracy, sentence structure and vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates very good grammatical accuracy, with no grammar errors. Uses a very wide range of sentence structures. Uses a very wide range of vocabulary with some precision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates good grammatical accuracy though with a few errors. Uses a wide range of sentence structures. Uses a wide range of vocabulary with some precision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates satisfactory grammatical accuracy, but with some errors. Uses a satisfactory range of sentences structures, with minor errors that do not impede communication of ideas. Uses a satisfactory range of vocabulary, with some vocabulary items not appropriate to the task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates limited grammatical accuracy, with some serious grammar errors. Uses a limited range of structures, with frequent errors that impedes communication of ideas. Uses a limited range of vocabulary with significant errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates very limited grammatical accuracy, with frequent serious errors. Uses a limited range of sentences which greatly impedes communication. Uses a very narrow range of vocabulary with major errors.
Organization: text structure (introduction-body-conclusion), paragraph structure (topic sentence and relevant supporting sentences), text coherence and cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a very clear text structure, and well-sequenced material (topic sentence – supporting evidence) within the paragraph. Shows extremely logical progression of ideas and very good use of cohesive devices. The text communicates fluently to the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a clear text structure, and sequenced material (topic sentence – supporting evidence) within the paragraph. Shows very logical progression of ideas and good use of cohesive devices. The text communicates quite fluently to the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a fairly clear text structure, and reasonable sequence of material (topic sentence – supporting evidence) within the paragraph. Shows logical progression of ideas and mostly appropriate use of cohesive devices. The text communicates to the reader although there is some strain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows an unclear organizational pattern, with introduction and/or conclusion missing or mixed up with other parts. Shows limited use of cohesive devices. The text causes a lot of strain for the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows no clear organizational structure. Shows unclear progression of ideas and incorrect or nonexistent use of cohesive devices. The text causes great strain for the reader