

IELTS Writing Sample #190

Understanding 'to what extent' questions

Some questions, such as '*How is hygiene ensured in the production of cheese?*' and '*What were the causes of the Great Depression?*' can be answered with a series of facts. Other questions, such as '*To what extent has the diet of Melanesians changed over the past 20 years?*' and '*How far does a knowledge of statistics contribute to success in tertiary study?*' require an answer expressed in terms of degree: for example, '*The diet of Melanesians has changed to a great extent/very significantly/ minimally/not at all/etc.*'

Questions requiring an answer expressed in terms of degree cannot be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. In order to answer them, it is useful to 'translate' them into questions which can be given a 'yes' or 'no' answer. This will help in the next stage of writing: preparing a plan.

EXAMPLE:

- To what degree is a knowledge of statistics useful in tertiary study? = Is a knowledge of statistics useful in tertiary study?
- To what extent has the diet of Melanesians changed over the past 20 years? = Has the diet of Melanesians Changed over the past 20 years?
- To what extent is environmental damage irreversible? = Is environmental damage irreversible?
- How necessary is media censorship in a modern society? = Is media censorship necessary in a modern society?

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Genetic engineering is a dangerous trend. It should be limited.

To what extent do you agree?

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

Write at least 250 words.

Sample answer

Over the last few decades, remarkable advances have been made in the field of genetic engineering. Consequently, scientists now have the ability to manipulate genes for a range of purposes, from making improvements in agriculture to experimentation with human genes. The question, however, is whether there should be any limitations on this development. In this essay, I shall examine both sides of the argument.

Firstly it is clear that genetic engineering has brought about certain benefits in terms of crop production. Now plants, for example, can produce more fruit more quickly. This achievement means that greater harvests are guaranteed, so that more people can be fed. As for the impact of genetic engineering on healthcare, advocates claim it could be used to cure a range of health-related problems, such as cystic fibrosis and Alzheimer's. Children and adults with these diseases endure terrible suffering, yet with gene therapy, there is a possibility of a better quality of life.

Despite these advantages, there are some aspects of genetic engineering which require ongoing consideration. Critics claim that genetically modified plants have little nutritional value and that they will lead to the eradication of weeds, which many insect species depend on. In the case of gene therapy, it is still uncertain how the alteration of one gene, even though it may be faulty, could affect the functions of the human body in the long term.

In my opinion, the benefits of genetic engineering can outweigh the drawbacks, provided governments and scientists consider the consequences carefully, and put people before profit.

(256 words)